

THE AVA PROJECT

Empowering young people to address domestic and sexual violence

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Executive Summary

Overview

- **The AVA Project: Empowering young people to address domestic and sexual violence** (hereafter referred to as 'the Project') was developed and led by AVA, a UK charity committed to ending gender based violence and abuse. The overarching aim of the project was:

"to deliver therapeutic group-work and leadership development to disadvantaged and marginalised young people to improve their understanding of domestic and sexual violence, to improve their emotional wellbeing and to empower them to influence peers and advocate for the needs of themselves and others within social care and education services"
- The project defined itself as underpinned by a number of key values including: *youth work* (specifically the principle of voluntary engagement); *participation*; and *feminist practice*. It was funded for £298,254 over three years by *Big Lottery: Reaching Communities Fund*, commencing in April 2013 and, with a short project extension continued until July 2016.
- The project was delivered in five local sites (localities) across England, through two distinct though related models:

MODEL 1: 'Peer Education' - a therapeutic group-work model across two project sites focused on improving emotional wellbeing and awareness of domestic and sexual violence (DSV).

MODEL 2: 'Youth leadership' - a youth leadership project to improve young people's emotional wellbeing, their understanding of domestic and sexual violence (DSV) and that of their peers, whilst increasing opportunities for, and the abilities of, young people to influence services aimed at them in relation to DSV.

The International Centre: researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking , University of Bedfordshire was commissioned to undertake a small scale evaluation (£17,000 over three years) to help identify evidence of the project's intended outcomes and learning from the process.

- The key evaluation questions addressed were:
 - Did the project reach all intended beneficiaries (and what aided accessibility for those traditionally marginalised from services)?
 - Whether and in what ways the project:
 - enhances young people's wellbeing;
 - improves young people's awareness and understanding of domestic and sexual violence; and
 - increases young people's skills and abilities to influence the way services are delivered?
 - What helped or hindered the achievement of key outcomes for young people?
 - How effectively was the project structured, including a consideration of the quality of the partnerships and networks set up to deliver the project's activities.

Reach and engagement

- The AVA project was accessible to a diverse range of participants including those traditionally marginalised from mainstream services and facing disadvantage. The project had above average representation from young parents, care experienced young people, those not in education, training or employment, those excluded from mainstream school and young people with experience of domestic and/or sexual violence.
- Young people's motivations for engaging in the project primarily related to developing skills and confidence; gaining greater understanding of domestic and sexual violence (DSV) and helping peers.
- Access across the project was supported by diverse and targeted referral routes. In some sites there was evidence of targeted strategies to reduce identified barriers for particular groups including young parents, young people from BME communities and those who are socially isolated. A number of these strategies (such as the provision of childcare or transport for those in rural areas) required the identification of funding for additional resources.
- Representation of young men across the project was low and there is evidence of the need for alternative approaches to engage them in work of this nature.

Impact: emotional wellbeing

- Self-reports from young people across all five sites identified three main ways in which the project benefitted their emotional wellbeing and life opportunities. These can be characterised as: improved confidence and self-efficacy; improved social networks; and increased access to further opportunities (including training, employment and education and other forms of professional support). These messages were supported by evidence from all other stakeholders.
- Improved confidence and self-efficacy were the most strongly evidenced outcomes relating to young people's wellbeing. They were associated with exposure to new opportunities and challenges; responsibility for presenting to or teaching others; acknowledgment and accreditation; and group based learning.
- Improved social networks, including enhanced peer support, were associated with the group based learning model and inclusion of personal/social development within the curriculum.
- Young people's access to further opportunities were supported by strong relationships with practitioners through which signposting and referral took place. This outcome was also linked to participants' improved confidence and being able to evidence their achievements.
- Across the five sites 52 young people received a minimum of one accreditation (47 young people received two).

Impact: improved awareness and understanding of domestic and sexual violence

- The evaluation found strong evidence that participation in the project contributed to improved awareness and understanding of domestic and to a lesser extent sexual violence among primary and secondary participants¹.

¹ See section 1.10 for definitions of primary, secondary and tertiary participants

- Evidence of improvements in knowledge and understanding of domestic violence include: recognition of broader forms of behaviours that constitute abuse; increased empathy towards victims and knowledge of strategies and services to support those affected.
- Evidence from young people, practitioners and local project outputs (such as films and postcards designed by young participants) demonstrate confident communication of key messages to wider audiences.
- Evidence suggested that opportunities for primary participants to 'cascade learning' to their peers helped to embed their learning and strengthen their commitment to the issues addressed.

Impact: improved skills and ability to influence

- The project improved young people's capacity to influence service development through the development of leadership and multi-media communication skills, subject specific knowledge and improved political awareness. This was particularly evident in model two although there was also limited evidence of this in model one.
- Through the project young people in each site produced multi-media *outputs* or *resources* (films, exhibitions, presentations) which became tools for campaigning and influencing. Young people in site three also produced a research report for the same purposes.
- Across the five sites, forty nine young people are known to have taken part in activities which brought them face to face with policy makers and provided opportunities to voice their opinions and recommendations for improving service responses to DSV.
- Although young people's *ability* to influence was harder to evidence there was tangible evidence of the research produced by young people in site three eliciting a commitment from local decision-makers to respond to its findings.
- Participants' ability to inform local services was in part determined by the existing relationships between the site and local decision makers

Project structure and partnerships

- AVA's leadership of the project provided several significant opportunities for 'added value', supporting local sites with resources, networking and a route for feeding young people's messages and ideas into national policy and influencing fora.
- Practitioners from each of the sites valued the AVA project leadership for its flexibility, supportive nature and responsiveness to changing needs of each site. Sites relied to varying degrees on support from the project leadership and subsequently the ability of AVA to meet these needs varied.
- The diversity of local partners demonstrated the viability of delivering the project aims in a variety of different statutory and voluntary settings and each site presented an opportunity to work with distinct cohorts of disadvantaged and marginalised young people.
- The complexity of the project structure, presented challenges for developing a shared understanding and expectations across all sites and partners. At times practitioners expressed a need for further

clarification about the project resources and expectations. It is suggested that in a project of this nature strategies for effective communication require additional investment.

- Characteristics of local sites, associated with successful delivery of the project included: a strong sense of ownership (and understanding) of the project aims; a value base that aligned to participatory practice; existing experience of work to address domestic and/or sexual violence and leverage with local influencers and decision makers.
- The projects commitment to engaging marginalised young people required acceptance of a variety of models for engaging 'cohorts' of primary and secondary participants. This included approaches to engagement which don't rely on a fixed or closed group from start to finish.

1. EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Background and project overview

- 1.1 **The AVA Project: Empowering young people to address domestic and sexual violence** (hereafter referred to as Project) was developed and led by AVA, a UK charity committed to ending gender based violence and abuse.
- 1.2 The project was developed with support from Platform 51 (now Changing Lives: a national charitable organisation for young women) and Chilypep (a project focused on children and young people's empowerment and participation).
- 1.3 While AVA were responsible for the overall management and oversight of the project, Platform 51 and Chilypep brought additional expertise in peer education and children and young people's leadership, respectively. In addition, both organisations were experienced in designing and leading relevant accredited programmes of work.
- 1.4 The overarching aim of the project was described as follows:

"To deliver therapeutic group-work and leadership development to disadvantaged and marginalised young people to improve their understanding of domestic and sexual violence, to improve their emotional wellbeing and to empower them to influence peers and advocate for the needs of themselves and others within social care and education services"
- 1.5 Three key outcomes were identified for the project:
 - *Outcome 1:* Young people taking part in the project report achieving improved emotional wellbeing and peer support
 - *Outcome 2:* Young people taking part in the project and their peers demonstrate improved understanding of domestic and sexual violence, accessing support and advising friends
 - *Outcome 3:* Young people taking part in the project will increase their skills and abilities to influence the way young people's services are delivered.
- 1.6 The project defined itself as underpinned by a number of key values including: *youth work* (specifically the principle of voluntary engagement); *participation*; and *feminist practice*.
- 1.7 The project was funded for £298,254 over three years by *Big Lottery: Reaching Communities Fund*. It commenced in April 2013 and, with a short project extension continued until July 2016.
- 1.8 The project was originally designed to be delivered in six local sites (localities) across England, through two distinct though related models:

MODEL 1: 'Peer Education' - a therapeutic group-work model across two project sites focused on improving emotional wellbeing and awareness of domestic and sexual violence (DSV). This model was delivered in sites one and two in partnership with Platform 51's local services.

MODEL 2: 'Youth Leadership' a youth leadership project to improve young people's emotional wellbeing, their understanding of domestic and sexual violence (DSV) and that of their peers, whilst increasing opportunities for, and the abilities of, young people to influence services aimed at them in relation to DSV. This model was delivered in sites three, four, five and six. (A brief outline of the project delivery in each of the sites is described in chapter 4.)

- 1.9 The key change to the project (described in chapter 4) was the delivery of the project in five rather than six sites. This stemmed from the discontinuation of work in site six (one of the intended 'youth leadership' localities) where delivery of the project was halted after some initial development work but before any primary participants were fully engaged.
- 1.10 In each site, young people were involved in two different ways:
- Firstly, as '**primary participants**' engaging in the group-work programme (model 1) or the youth leadership programme (model 2).
 - Secondly, as '**secondary participants**' (sites one and two only): cohorts of young people who attended a six week awareness raising programme developed and delivered by primary participants in sites one and two (model 1).
 - Thirdly as '**tertiary participants**': wider cohorts of young people were engaged through one-off contact with the project, as either recipients of individual peer awareness raising sessions, or as audiences and participants for resources and events delivered and developed by the 'primary participants'.
- 1.11 The original bid outlined an aim to engage 88 primary or secondary participants and 300 tertiary participants.

The evaluation

- 1.12 *The International Centre: researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking*, University of Bedfordshire was commissioned to undertake a small scale evaluation (£17,000 over three years) to help identify evidence of the project's intended outcomes and learning from the process.
- 1.13 A number of evaluation questions were initially identified by AVA under five themes: *reach; impact; implementation; partnership working and sustainability*. The following questions were therefore addressed by the evaluation team in agreement with AVA and used to structure the findings chapters of this report:

Reach: Did the project reach all intended beneficiaries (and what aided accessibility for those traditionally marginalised from services)?

Impact: Whether and in what ways the project:

- enhances young people's wellbeing,
- improves young people's awareness and understanding of DSV, and
- increases young people's skills and abilities to influence the way services are delivered?

Implementation: What helped or hindered the achievement of key outcomes for young people?

Partnership working: How effectively was the project structured, including a consideration of:

- the quality of the partnerships and networks set up to deliver the project's activities
- engagement of wider organisations (local authority partnerships, commissioning bodies and national services)
- the values underlying the project (including the approach to youth participation)?

- 1.14 AVA had also asked the evaluation to address a question about 'sustainability': *How can impacts of the work be sustained after the project funding has ended?* However it was agreed that this was difficult to address given the limited resources available to the evaluation and a separate section on this topic is not included. However, where evidence of the project's longer term impact and/or embedded outcomes were available these are discussed. Any evidence relating to sustainability

should be considered with the caveat that it is indicative evidence only and no longer- term follow up has been possible.

2. ETHICS AND METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Data collection and analysis

- 2.1 In order to best meet the evaluation aims, within the constraints of a small scale evaluation, a multi-method approach was utilised. Data collected was primarily qualitative but a number of pieces of quantitative data were also collected and analysed.
- 2.2 The evaluation sought to triangulate the views of a number of different stakeholders in assessing the degree to which outcomes had been delivered in each of the five sites. These include the views of:
 - **Young people** (primary and in some cases secondary participants): elicited through: 12 focus groups across the five sites²; a small number of individual interviews with young people who could not attend focus groups (n=3); self-reflective case studies (n=14); feedback forms (n = 57); local site monitoring; and distance travelled tool³ (Domestic Violence Learning Scale: n=36).
 - **Local and national project partners**: elicited through interviews (n=22) and project reports(n=9)
 - **External stakeholders** (community members and external professionals) elicited through face to face and phone interviews (n=4)
 - **The project coordinator (AVA)**: elicited through yearly 'project update' interviews (n=3) and annual project reports (n=3).
- 2.3 Each site was visited by a member of the evaluation team on a minimum of three occasions and fieldwork notes supplemented the data collection activities listed above.
- 2.4 Further evidence was also gathered in each site via: reviews of project documentation (annual project reports, session plans and service level agreements); reviews of young people's outputs (films; presentations; photography exhibitions and reports); and evaluation team observations of project events.
- 2.5 Monitoring data on participants' attendance levels, equalities indicators and accreditation, collected by local site staff, was also reviewed for 92 participants (60 primary participants and 32 secondary participants) across five sites.
- 2.6 Given the limited resources available for the evaluation, the process was designed to enable both evaluators and local project staff to collect data. Qualitative data was primarily collected by the evaluation team who also provided support to local project staff to collect quantitative data and some written qualitative feedback.
- 2.7 Finally a short scoping review was undertaken to establish the extent and nature of existing research and evaluation relating to 'peer support' or participatory practice to address DSV with young people. This review was used to inform the authors' approach to evaluating the effectiveness of such initiatives and suggested a number of key themes for consideration in analysis of the data.

² Wherever possible focus groups were organised to capture young people's perspectives at the outset of the project and towards completion of the project. In all sites a minimum of two focus groups took place and in some cases three. A total of 28 unique primary participants took part in focus groups.

³ A second distance travelled tool (the Warwick Edinburgh Scale) was also implemented in some sites but the findings have not been used in this evaluation for reasons explained later in this chapter.

- 2.8 Given the predominantly qualitative nature of the data it was subjected to interpretative thematic analysis and coded and organised using NVivo (a computer assisted data analysis programme). An attempt was made to capture both site specific learning and some comparative analysis across sites.

Evaluative challenges

- 2.9 The evaluation encountered a number of *methodological* or *logistical* challenges which are expanded upon below.
- 2.10 Prior to describing these challenges it should be noted that despite the limitations presented, sufficient data was captured to offer evidence-informed commentary on four of the five key areas of the evaluation:
- The reach of the project to engage marginalised young people
 - The impact of the project on young people taking part
 - Factors which helped or hindered achievement of key outcomes for young people, and
 - The effectiveness of the project structure and partnerships
- 2.11 As noted previously, the final area 'sustainability' was less easy to identify robust and triangulated evidence for although a small number of evidence informed reflections are shared throughout the report.

Methodological challenges

- 2.12 The first and most significant methodological challenge relates to inconsistent implementation of distance travelled tools across and within project sites. Two distinct 'distance travelled tools' were used on the project: the Domestic Violence Learning Scale (DVLS) (Galvani, 2013), used to measure *outcome 1* (improvements in young people's awareness and understanding of DSV) and the Warwick-Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale (WEWS), used to measure *outcome 2* (young people experience enhanced wellbeing). Resource limitations required local site staff to implement the two measurement tools with support from the evaluation team. The intention was that each measurement tool should be undertaken with project participants at three points of their engagement: when first joining the project (T1); part way through (T2); and at the end of the project (T3). However the validity of data from the tools was compromised by two factors: variable patterns of young people's attendance and inconsistent implementation in different project sites and at different times. This was particularly significant for the use of the WEWS. Consequently data from the DVLS was only valid for 36 of the 92 participants and the inconsistent implementation of WEWS meant it was deemed inappropriate to use available data without risking potentially misleading conclusions. Important learning for future evaluations includes the need for resources to ensure similar tools are implemented by members of the evaluation team to ensure consistency, or time made available to fully train practitioners in their use.
- 2.13 The second methodological challenge relates to diversity of project implementation. While potential for local site innovation was recognised as a characteristic of the initial project plan and its commitment to participatory practice, this limited potential for comparability across sites and more significantly a comparison of the two distinct models: 'peer education' and 'youth leadership'. A formal comparison of the two models was not deemed appropriate following observations by the evaluation team that differences between the two models were less significant than differences between sites implementing the same model. Despite this, comparative learning about project implementation in different contexts, and reflections on cross site learning has been elicited.

- 2.14 Thirdly there were challenges relating to the feasibility of evidencing young people's 'influence' on service development given the need for longitudinal evidence and the diffuse nature of such potential changes and the timeframes and resources available to the evaluation. In response to this challenge evidence was gathered of young people's improved *capacity* to influence, *activities* and *outputs* designed to influence and the *creation of contexts* which improved young people's potential for influence. This is explored in more detail in chapter 8.
- 2.15 Finally, in keeping with similar evaluations, it should be noted that available evidence on the impact of the project on participants' wellbeing disproportionally reflects the experiences of those young people most actively engaged with the project. Experiences of young people unable or unwilling to continue engaging, are harder to capture and unlikely to be as fully reflected here, given the limited nature of resources available for the evaluation.

Logistical challenges

- 2.16 The primary logistical challenge related to a disparity between the small scale nature of the evaluation and the complex, multi-site nature of the project. Consequently resources were stretched across five distinct geographic sites over three years. This was further complicated by the (unexpected) fragmentation of some locality sites: this meant project activities running simultaneously with two or more separate cohorts of young people and staff in different organisations within the individual sites. This inevitably limited the amount of direct contact possible between the evaluation team and each cohort, and increased reliance on local partners for some aspects of data monitoring and collection.
- 2.17 A second and related logistical challenge was the unforeseen changes and fluctuations in the project delivery. These included changes in personnel; the discontinued work in one site; and changes to the cohort of young people in some sites. While some of these changes reflect the realities of working with young people and highlight the project's ability to respond to changing funding or organisational contexts, they also restricted opportunities for follow up evaluative activities.

Ethics

- 2.18 The AVA evaluation builds on the existing expertise of the *International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking* in designing and prioritising ethical, child and young person centred applied research and evaluation.
- 2.19 Formal ethical approval was granted for the evaluation from the University of Bedfordshire's Institute of Applied Social Research Ethics Committee and the wider University's Research Ethics Committee. The evaluation also received ethical approval from the London borough of Sutton local authority.
- 2.20 The ethical process follows requirements for ethical approval as outlined by The Economic and Social Research Council, The British Sociological Association Ethical Guidelines and National Children's Bureau's guidelines for research with children and young people.
- 2.21 Key ethical principles for the evaluation included:
- Voluntary participation and informed consent of all participants (and where required consent of parents and carers)
 - Confidentiality of all information shared with the evaluation team, except in scenarios where information indicated a young person was at risk of serious harm to themselves or others (An agreed protocol was established for managing this event if it were to occur).
 - Anonymisation of data relating to young people and practitioners throughout reports and related presentations. (A full copy of the ethical approach can be provided upon request to the authors).

3. CONTEXT: Policy and literature

- 3.1 For the purposes of this report the following definitions of domestic and sexual violence (DSV) have been used:

Domestic violence: Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological; physical; sexual; financial; emotional. (Home Office, 2016)

Sexual violence: The term sexual violence incorporates any behaviour that is perceived to be of a sexual nature, which is unwanted or takes place without consent or understanding (DHSSPSNI 2008).

- 3.2 This section provides a brief overview of the policy context and 'headline' findings from academic literature about the involvement of children and young people in efforts to prevent DSV (involving peer mentoring and/or peer leadership programmes).

Domestic and sexual violence policy and service context

- 3.3 The last five years have seen an increased interest in issues relating to DSV among adolescents reflected in high profile media, research, inquiries and policy work (see for example Barter et al. 2011; Firmin, 2011; Beckett et al., 2013; Berelowitz et al., 2013; Barter et al., 2015).
- 3.4 Studies highlight that:
- Two thirds (65.9%) of contact sexual abuse experienced by children up to age 17 was perpetrated by someone under 18 (Radford et al 2011)
 - A quarter of Barnardo's sexual exploitation service users were abused by their peers (2011)
 - Almost a third of 16-18-year-old girls say they've been subjected to unwanted sexual touching in UK schools (EVAW 2010)
 - One in five girls (aged 14 – 17) in England have suffered physical violence from their boyfriend and more than four in ten have experienced sexual coercion (Barter et al., 2015).
- 3.5 Related policy and research developments include: the publication of high profile reviews and inquiries into child sexual exploitation (see for example Berelowitz et al., 2013; Coffey, 2014; Jay, 2014) and increased recognition of intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) in young people's relationships (Home Office, 2015). In addition the government definition of 'domestic violence' has been amended to include 16 and 17 year olds (Home Office, 2013); 'child sexual abuse' has been defined by central government as a national threat, and the first parliamentary inquiry into the scale and impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools has been launched (Women and Equalities Committee: 2016)..
- 3.6 Concurrently there is evidence that the number of projects across the UK working with young people and aiming to prevent DSV is growing (Ellis 2004; Stanley et al. 2015a. 2015b). However, robust and longitudinal evaluations of these projects are limited and there is no consensus on 'what works' (Humphrey et al., 2008; Stanley et. al. 2015a, 2015b).

Children and young people's participation in domestic abuse and sexual violence research, policy and practice

- 3.7 Following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), participatory principles have increasingly become enshrined in national law along with the concept of children as 'rights bearers' (Children Act 2004). Children's entitlement to inform decision-making about their lives at both individual and collective levels is also reflected in policy and guidance (HM Government, 2015), quality standards for working with young people (Badham and Wade, 2010; Department of Health, 2011); and related inspection frameworks (Ofsted, 2015; HMIC, 2014).
- 3.8 Specific recognition of the need to enshrine children and young people's participation in responses to DSV are reflected to a limited degree within current government guidance and wider policy (see for example DCSF, 2009; Berelowitz, 2013; Home Office, 2016).
- 3.9 In practice however the terms 'child centred practice' and 'children's participation' are interpreted and applied variably - a recent report exploring the implementation of the UNCRC described the realisation of Article 12 as 'highly variable' across the UK (2015: 12). Within services addressing child sexual exploitation specifically, recent research reports have highlighted diverse approaches to children's participation and varying levels of engagement with, or understanding of the concept (Harris et al., 2015; Brodie et al., 2016; Warrington, 2016).

The use of participatory or peer support preventative models to address domestic and sexual violence

- 3.10 The following section summarises findings from literature that considers practice to address DSV with young people and the use of both participatory and/or peer support approaches. It should be noted that relevant literature in this field is limited. Also as Fox et al. (2014) note evaluations of preventative work (on DSV) with children and young people in the UK are largely qualitative, with the majority focusing on changes in awareness, as opposed to behavioural change or policy influencing.

Thematic findings: facilitation and approach

- 3.11 Humphrey et al. (2008) found that the majority of initiatives to address DSV with young people are led by a range of people (multi-agency teams) including school staff and external agencies from specialist organisations, the latter being the predominant model. Fox et al. (2014) argue that preventative and awareness raising projects should be delivered through collaborations between teachers (non-specialists) and an outside facilitator. This is justified as an approach which ensures the right messages are being delivered, but in a way that is sustainable and can then be integrated into a whole school approach. Meanwhile Stanley et al. (2015a) undertook a comprehensive literature review which suggests there is no consensus on *who* it is that should deliver the training, but highlights the value of 'participatory practice'. Although there appears to be little research which formally considers the role of peer facilitation there is broad support for the principles which underpin this – as outlined further below (see 3.24).
- 3.12 The literature highlights that whoever delivers the project, it is essential they are well trained and highly-skilled in order to approach the subject sensitively and appropriately. An ability to manage disclosures and create safe spaces for young people to explore sensitive issues is noted to be key (Humphrey et al., 2008).
- 3.13 There is no consensus on whether single gender or mixed gender projects work best, however Stanley et al. (2011) cite evidence from literature that *"using a combination of single and mixed groups affords opportunities to discuss issues in different settings and offers a flexibility that enables projects to be more responsive to the needs of particular groups."* (227). Some authors (Stanley et al., 2011;

Fox et al., 2014) suggest that gendered perspectives may risk alienating boys and young men although there is minimal detail about how or why this is this case. A consideration of the gender of trainer is also important (Bell and Stanley, 2006).

Flexibility, duration and context of interventions

- 3.14 Fox et al (2014) highlight the importance of flexible approaches to delivering domestic violence and sex and relationships education alongside the need to create safe spaces for children and young people to explore these issues. They note that there is no one size fits all approach, and adaptability to the context is very important.
- 3.15 Duration of projects are discussed by Humphrey et al.'s literature review (2008) which found that the majority of UK projects are short in length, and noted that this compromised the ability to projects to embed change and enable long lasting results.
- 3.16 A majority of projects reviewed within the literature took place in schools, as Humphreys et al. note: *"There is little clarity, however, as to whether work takes place with children in schools because it is convenient, it is where children are a mass and captive audience, or rather the recognition that schools are themselves a key institution in the production of normative gendered identities and the concomitant violence"* (2008:126-127).
- 3.17 Stanley et al (2011), argue that there is logic to delivering projects in schools: *"The values and attitudes of the peer group emerged from this study as a crucial mechanism for change and it therefore seems appropriate to continue to deliver interventions to whole populations of children and young people"* (167). However they highlight young people outside of mainstream schools and stress the need for projects to also target *"PRUs, special schools and youth offending centres"* as these are likely to include those high-risk groups who may require additional services" (Ibid).
- 3.18 Casey et al. (2009) comment on the significance of context noting: *"Contextualized prevention is particularly important for the sexual violence field. Attitudes, norms, and beliefs about sex, women and relationships are deeply culturally embedded, and vary among religious, ethnic, and community groups"*. A similar point is raised by Fontes who notes that *"to be effective, sexual violence prevention needs to respond to localized worldviews"* (1995:100).
- 3.19 Stanley et al. (2015b) support this need for local adaptation and link these arguments to participatory practice noting that *"Whilst off-the-shelf projects are inevitably influential, there are strong arguments for including local elements in project design and content and for ensuring that those who will be both delivering and receiving the intervention contribute to its development"* (129).

Participatory practice and creative methods

- 3.20 Interestingly there is some consensus within the literature that children and young people's voices need to be heard around 'what works for them' in relation to domestic violence prevention efforts (Fox et al, 2014). As Stanley et al. note, *"Active participation in prevention initiatives was considered to enhance learning –'people learn better by doing'"* (2015a:133) and increase authenticity and ownership.
- 3.21 Stanley et al. (2015b) note that children and young people's participation *"could be achieved by a variety of means including incorporating material co-produced with young people into projects; through engaging them in participative learning activities such as drama and by training and involving them as peer mentors or facilitators"* (129).
- 3.22 The value of utilising creative methods for domestic violence awareness raising and sex and relationship education (SRE) are also discussed in the literature. The particular value of *"participative*

and active approaches... such as theatre/role play, video/DVD and small and whole group discussion" (Humphrey et al 2008: 32) is supported by several authors (Debbonaire, 2002; Mullender et al., 2002; Hester and Westmarland, 2005; Bell and Stanley, 2006; Ellis, 2006; Stanley et al 2015a). Similar findings are also raised in research about initiatives to address sexual violence among young people (Batsleer, 2011; Cody, 2015).

- 3.23 In one study young people showed a preference for the use of drama and narrative – citing its ability to help them emotionally connect with the subject matter and increasing accessibility for those with low literacy levels (Bell and Stanley, 2006; Stanley et al 2015a). Christensen (2014) supports this and argues that the use of drama facilitates the development of emotional intelligence.

Peer education/mentoring and influencing:

- 3.24 The role of peer mentoring and support is also explored within the literature, with evidence that participants in domestic violence prevention projects were responsive to peer mentoring schemes (Kernsmith et al., 2011; Nicholls 2013). Stanley et al. (2015a) suggest that such approaches increase the authenticity of messages and help improve engagement.
- 3.25 Some caution is also noted however and Humphreys et al. (2008) note that *"peer educators are increasingly seen as an effective way to increase the knowledge and skills of young people... but this is not conclusively seen as more effective than adult facilitators"* (Humphreys et al., 2008:131). Similarly Weisz and Black (2009) urged caution stating that most of the literature on peer education is based on theory and opinion rather than empirical evidence. Yet in later work the same authors conclude that *"many teen dating violence and sexual assault risk reduction programs will and should include peer education or youth leadership components. Doing so is empowering, respectful of youth, and makes programs more relevant to the adolescents"* (Weisz and Black, 2010).
- 3.26 A number of authors cite related evidence of both peer group influence during adolescence (Stanley et al., 2015a) and peers as an important source of support (Mullender (2002) and use this as a basis for arguing the need to involve peers influencing positive change. For example, through moderated peer-to-peer online youth forums - demonstrated to be an example of how peer influence can be positively harnessed (Webb et al, 2008). Meanwhile girl-guiding research (2013) found that girls find it easier to talk to peers than adults about relationships, however it is important that these peers have the right training so they can give the right support.
- 3.27 There is also debate within the literature about who should be chosen as a peer educator. Sanders McDonagh et al. (2015) argue that it should be those who are able to perform confidently, and able to continue as peer educators. Meanwhile Rawsthorne et al. (2010) found that peer educators that *"matched"* the group of young people they were working with were seen as more authentic and had a greater ability to make participants feel included. They also found that peer education can be empowering for the peer educator, and creates a more relaxed atmosphere in the session.
- 3.28 However several authors point out that the potential of peer support or leadership projects can only be realised if programs have sufficient resources to *"provide adequate assistance, training, and support for youth who are involved in any aspect of youth leadership; and to evaluate their programs for continuous improvement."* (Weisz and Black, 2010: 658; see also Rawsthorne et al., 2010)
- 3.29 Kernsmith et al. (2011) evaluated a peer mentoring project in school, and found that it did not benefit those students who were least engaged with school. They argue that there is a need for context specific projects, with close attention paid to who is picked as a peer educator and acts as a 'role model'. Similarly Stanley et al. (2015a) argue for the need to tailor projects to enable more marginalised young people including those with experience of domestic violence to fully engage.

- 3.30 There was very little literature identified which considered young people's role in influencing policy and service design/delivery in relation to DSV. Houghton (2015) provides an exception to this and explores examples of young people's involvement in policy consultation on domestic violence and suggests this may be an empowering process for individuals.
- 3.31 However Houghton (2015) also highlights the need for thoughtful ethical practice in this work, explaining that young people directly affected by an issue, should be involved in thinking through the ethics of becoming involved in related research or policy consultation. She notes feedback from young participants that their involvement and investment is only worth the emotion and time if they are given meaningful power and control over the process at every stage and that the outcome of their involvement leads to tangible change for other young people.

4. LOCAL SITE CONTEXTS

- 4.1 The following section provides a descriptive overview of the five active project sites where the project was delivered (listed according to the two project models they were aligned to). Some details of site six are provided where work was planned but not delivered. Figure 1 on the previous page also provides a comparative overview of key characteristics of sites.

Model 1: Peer Education

Two sites (one and two) delivered model 1: 'Peer Education. Both were a single local centre-based project, which were part of Platform 51, a national network of organisations supporting young women. The overarching aim of this model was to focus on improving participants' emotional wellbeing and awareness of DSV. This was undertaken in both sites through the local development of accredited structured group-work (aiming to engage four young women per site) and, following completion, support for these participants to design and deliver a peer education programme to other young people (secondary participants). Additional supplementary activities were also developed in each site.

Site one: overview

- 4.2 Site one was a centre-based project in a small town in the rural south of England. It had dedicated premises, including a crèche. It provided a range of services for young women and recruited participants to the project primarily through its existing cohort of young women. The project was initially delivered by a project worker with support from the centre manager. However, due to changes to the project's personnel, additional support was also provided by a volunteer and a project/finance officer who took on active roles delivering the project. The centre manager and volunteer's involvement remained a consistent presence throughout.
- 4.3 The project built on existing work in site one which had considerable experience of running both accredited peer mentoring projects and working with young women to address domestic violence. The centre manager described it as *"quite a usual piece of work for us"*. She noted that experiencing or witnessing domestic violence was a prominent presenting issue for their service users.
- 4.4 Nine young women ('primary participants'), aged 17–22 years were recruited onto the project in site one and completed the group-work programme. Five additional places for participants were supported (beyond the four planned) by additional local fundraising which covered associated costs. Eight of the primary participants went on to deliver a domestic violence awareness programme to two additional cohorts of young women ('secondary participants') within a local school setting (totalling 23 young women). Additional activities included commissioning a community photographer to work with the young women to develop visual materials and resources to further support their work and promote awareness.
- 4.5 Key challenges in site one arose from staffing capacity and the impending closure of the local centre based project due to a decision made during the closure of Platform 51 nationally. This was announced three months into the project and resulted in the work being cut short (12 months instead of 24). This created related challenges for retaining and recruiting staff to work on the project. However adaptations to both the project plan and staffing were made and enabled the project work to be completed before the project closed.

Site two: overview

- 4.6 Site two was also a centre-based organisation working with young women and within walking distance of a northern town centre. It provided space for meetings and participants came from local areas within easy travel distance. It offers a broad range of services to young women through outreach, group-work and one to one provision.
- 4.7 Four participants ('primary participants'), aged 16 – 23years, were recruited by the project manager from young women with whom the centre already had established relationships. The project was staffed with existing personnel and involved a project manager and project worker. Both had prior experience of work relating to domestic violence.
- 4.8 Similar to site one, the project worked with the primary participants through a structured group-work programme and supported them to develop and deliver a programme to two cohorts of secondary participants (totalling 12 young women). In addition a number of presentations were delivered to local safeguarding professionals and groups to highlight the work of the programme and raise the profile of peer support.
- 4.9 Site two was also affected by the closure of the national umbrella organisation of Platform 51, however unlike site1, the service came under new management (Changing Lives). While this introduced some level of uncertainty for staff, the delivery of services to project participants were largely unaffected and the project identity remained largely unchanged during this time.

Model 2 - Youth leadership

Three sites (sites three, four and five) delivered model 2: A youth leadership project. The intention was to also run this model in a sixth site, but for reasons explained below this was not possible and the allocated resources were redirected to support sites three, four and five.

In common with model 1, the youth leadership work aimed to improve young people's emotional wellbeing, their understanding of DSV and that of their peers. In addition this model also sought to explicitly increase opportunities for young people to influence the delivery and development of services for young people in relation to DV and SV. To support this work one of the national partners – Chilypep was commissioned to undertake leadership training and accreditation with young people from each of the sites through a residential weekend. This was intended to support young people to develop and take ownership of their own campaign or influencing plans. Unlike model 1 the 'peer support' aspect of the project was not delivered through a structured group-work programme. This meant that additional beneficiaries received one off interventions or contact with the project enabling a wider but less intensive reach. For clarity, as noted in section 1.10, these beneficiaries are referred to as 'tertiary participants' As with model 1, additional supplementary activities were also developed in each site.

Site three: overview

- 4.10 Site three was a local third sector organisation who operated across a northern city and nearby towns to support the empowerment of marginalised young people (male and female) in their communities around a range of issues. The organisation identified itself as an expert on young people's participation rather than any single issue such as domestic violence, and different cohorts of young people were engaged depending on the issues addressed. For the purposes of delivering the project and recruiting young people, site three promoted the opportunity across a wide range of local organisations. Through this work it identified a number of referral routes and developed a key partnership with a housing project – supporting vulnerable young women who have experienced violence and abuse.

- 4.11 The project work was led by the organisation's managing director with the support of a participation project worker and a volunteer evaluator. Through the partnership with the young women's housing project additional support was also provided.
- 4.12 The intention in site three was to engage young people from two adjacent but distinct urban localities, in one group, however this proved unfeasible. Logistical issues such as supporting young people to travel to meetings and the absence of any one dedicated meeting space proved challenging. A decision was subsequently made to undertake work separately in the two distinct localities. Further partnerships were developed to enable this, however referral to the project was noted to be more challenging in one of the two newly formed localities. Although these changes were responsive to local needs this had significant implications for staff resources, reducing time available to dedicate to either site.
- 4.13 Work in site three (in both localities) involved a variety of activities including group-work, the development of research to capture the views of a wider network of young people, events to bring young people and policy makers together, trips to parliament to learn about political decision-making and the production of a film. There were significant changes to the cohort of young people engaged as primary participants over the three year period of the project. Across the two localities thirteen primary participants were engaged (12 female and one male). Primary participants gained accreditation for youth leadership and personal social development awards and were involved in peer influencing activities. Over 213 young people took part in the project as tertiary participants in site three through engagement in one off peer education sessions and research activities (focus groups and survey).
- 4.14 A key challenge identified by staff in site three was their limited integration with local multiagency forums and policy work on DSV. At the outset of the project staff from site three explained that as a small voluntary sector organisation they were not always '*kept in mind*' or '*invited to the table*' by others addressing these issues locally.

Site four: overview

- 4.15 Site four was initially planned to work in two settings within a South London borough: a generic centre based youth services and a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for young people who have been permanently excluded or who are at risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream school. The PRU had a strong reputation for support and expertise to address violence and abuse (judged outstanding by Ofsted 2015). The domestic violence coordinator for the borough was also a key partner in the project and developed links with both services.
- 4.16 Although some initial work took place within the youth service setting, changes to staff and funding resulted in this work terminating early. Two young women who were actively engaged in the project through the youth service were supported to continue the project by joining with young people from the PRU to complete their accreditation.
- 4.17 Within the PRU the project was led by the school lead for DSV and community cohesion and supported by colleagues within the school. The school was well connected to local agencies including social care, mainstream schools, youth offending teams and children's centres. According to the project worker a majority of the school population were known to be personally affected by domestic violence.
- 4.18 Fourteen young women, aged 13 – 15 years were involved as primary participants during the three year period of the project. Staff identified students who they felt would participate and needed additional support around issues of domestic violence, confidence and self-esteem. The project adopted a 'rolling recruitment' method for involvement to respond to frequent changes in pupil population which occur in PRU settings. It also enabled the project to involve more young people across the project timeline.

- 4.19 Project delivery was undertaken via weekly sessions, outside of a classroom environment, led by the project worker. They included a range of activities including: drama, discussion groups, art and written work. Outputs included presentations at a local authority Youth Summit, the production of a film, a photography project and sessions led by the young people in a local primary school.
- 4.20 A significant additional workload for project workers arose following disclosures by the young people during the project delivery. This led to the need for additional safeguarding work and further liaison with other agencies. While the project worker saw this as an important benefit of the project, contributing to the safety of the young people, it was also felt that the scale of the additional concerns arising was higher than had previously been anticipated.

Site five: overview

- 4.21 Site five is located in a youth work service providing a range of services, for young people aged 10 – 19 years old. The service is in a rural area with poor transport links, an important part of the context for the project. Site five ran the project in two distinct settings: a school and community based group.
- 4.22 Recruitment to the school based group primarily took place through referrals from the school nurse and a school counselling project, alongside information sessions. The school based group engaged seven young people (3 male and 4 female) aged 13 – 15, in weekly sessions immediately after school. The school based group was described by a project worker as the least established, due to sporadic attendance by some young people and cancellations or postponements of some weekly sessions due to a lack of staffing capacity.
- 4.23 The community based group comprised nine young people (1 male, 8 female) aged 15 – 19 who were identified as facing complex problems such as homelessness and experience of abusive relationships and subsequently targeted for engagement in the project. This community group met weekly in the first year of the project and fortnightly in subsequent years. Their sessions took place in the evenings in a large multi -purpose community centre.
- 4.24 Staffing for the project comprised two lead project workers assigned to support the community based group and the school group respectively. These two workers both had support from an additional youth worker to run the groups. The workers were supported by a project manager responsible for the service as a whole. Due to changes in staffing capacity after the first six months of the project the school group was amalgamated within the community based group.
- 4.25 The delivery model for the project focused on influencing policy-makers. This model was felt by the project workers to be the most suitable for the young people engaged in the project.
- 4.26 Additional funding from the local authority was identified to cover the high transport costs associated with working across a rural location with poor public transport links. This was identified as an essential component for young people's engagement within this site and was not covered by the original funding.
- 4.27 The project was delivered through group sessions including discussion, debates, role plays and viewing of video material. Independence Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) based within the local authority provided additional resources and training for staff and direct work in the sessions with young people. Members of the site five group completed the residential leadership event and two teambuilding trips to London. The young people made a short film aimed at educating people about domestic violence and challenging abusive relationships. The site five group hosted an event where the film was shown to an invited audience of stakeholders including local authority managers.

Site six: overview

- 4.28 Site six was a London borough and the initial project lead was the domestic violence coordinator for the borough. This individual identified an early commitment to sourcing participants through the Youth Offending Service (YOS). A focus on project delivery within the YOS presented challenges and opportunities.
- 4.29 One key challenge was the non-voluntary nature of young people's engagement in the service. This prevented the 'voluntary nature of participation' that was central to the model across the other sites. However plans to deliver the project in the YOS were noted to provide a particular opportunity to target young men for whom domestic violence was identified as a significant vulnerability factor. This decision was supported by the presence of two local "Domestic Violence Champions" who could lead the frontline work within the service.
- 4.30 A number of additional reservations about implementing the project within the YOS were identified by frontline workers prior to implementation. They noted:
- A lack of clarity about the purpose and nature of the project
 - Challenges to identify appropriate participants and meet the 'target' numbers
 - The transient nature of their case load and implications for sustaining engagement over the project duration
 - Confusion about where the impetus for the project originated (AVA or local strategic DV leads) and subsequently a lack of clarity about where and how to feedback concerns.
- 4.31 Despite this project workers also identified that the project held relevance for many of the young men using their service and that opportunities for young men to develop peer leadership skills offered a unique opportunity and had therapeutic potential.
- 4.32 Subsequently, initial 'potential participants' were identified and approached by the two project workers for participation in an intensive week long introductory project. This process involved individual home visits and additional engagement with participants' parents and carers in a number of cases. Once identified, risk assessments were completed for the potential participants and shared with AVA. Having assessed these risk assessments AVA identified significant concerns about the suitability of the project for many of the participants – particularly those who had histories of sexually harmful behaviours or who had perpetrated domestic violence themselves. Subsequently plans to run the project in site six were halted. Understandably this caused significant distress to the project workers engaged in recruiting participants and reportedly for some potential participants. They suggested that the suitability of the project (in its current format) for this cohort could (and should) have been assessed earlier to prevent disappointment and manage expectations of potential participants.
- 4.33 A key issue in site six appears to be the lack of clear lines of communication between various stakeholders. Those allocated to deliver the work reported limited direct contact with AVA and displayed limited understanding or ownership of the initiative's key aims and objectives. Although the statutory nature of the service meant some of the insecurity associated with core funding in other sites was not apparent here, resources were noted to be compromised by large and complex caseloads. Furthermore, this work was an 'add on' for the two project workers identified to lead it, who also had significant other caseload responsibilities.

'Site'	No. of delivery projects	Lead local partner	Timing: project implementation	Number of primary participants*	Model	Additional secondary participants	Accreditation
Site one – Kent	1	National young women's third sector org.	April 2013 – March 2013 (*project closure resulted in early finish)	9 Peer educators	Peer Education	23 beneficiaries of 6 week peer education project	9 Understanding the role of Peer Mentors 9 Freedom from DV (OCN)
Site two – East Midlands Town	1	National young women's third sector org.	April 2013 – March 2013	4 Peer educators Beneficiaries	Peer Education	12 beneficiaries of 6 week peer education project	4 Understanding the role of Peer Mentors 4 Freedom from DV (OCN)
Site three – 'South Yorkshire'	2	Local voluntary sector youth participation organisation	March 2013 – July 2016	13 Youth leaders	Peer Leadership	213 beneficiaries of individual awareness raising sessions	13 PSD Awards 18 Leadership Awards
Site four – South London Borough	2	PRU and Mainstream youth service	March 2013 – July 2016	15 Youth leaders	Peer Leadership	*Unknown: includes audience for young people's events	10 PSD Awards 10 Leadership
Site five – East of England county	2	School & Community group	March 2014 – July 2016	16 Youth leaders	Peer Leadership	*Unknown: includes audience for young people's film launch	11 PSD Awards 11 Leadership
Site six – East London Borough	N/A	YOT	March 2014 – discontinued in April 2015	0	Peer Leadership	N/A	N/A

Fig 1. Overview of sites

5. FINDINGS: Engagement and reach

Key Messages

- The AVA project was accessible to a diverse range of participants including those traditionally marginalised from mainstream services and facing disadvantage. The project had above average representation from young parents, care experienced young people, those not in education, training or employment, those excluded from mainstream school and young people with experience of domestic and/or sexual violence.
- Across the project accessibility was supported by diverse and targeted referral routes and in some sites there was evidence of targeted strategies to reduce identified barriers for particular groups.
- Representation of young men across the project was low and there is evidence of the need for alternative approaches to engage them in work of this nature.
- Young people's motivations for engaging in the project primarily related to developing skills and confidence; gaining greater understanding of DSV

- 5.1 A central aim of the project was to engage disadvantaged and marginalised young people. The key question identified for the evaluation team was:

Did the project reach all intended beneficiaries (and what aided accessibility for those traditionally marginalised from services)?

- 5.2 Overall across the five sites the project engaged 60 primary participants; 32 secondary participants and over 300 young people as tertiary participants (those who had a 'one-off' contact with project). In doing so the project met its overall aim (as stated in the initial bid) of engaging 88 young people as primary or secondary participants, and engaging 300 young people as tertiary participants, through engagement with young people in the wider community.
- 13 young people accessed project as peer educators (model 1 – primary participants)
 - 47 young people accessed project as youth leaders (model 2 – primary participants)
 - 32 young people accessed project through taking part in a series of group sessions that were led by the peer educators (model 1 – secondary participants)
 - 300+ young people accessed project as attendees at one-off workshops, events, school lessons, research participants (model 2 – tertiary participants)

Reach and accessibility

- 5.3 Evidence from literature suggests there is an identified need to target domestic violence awareness projects (and related peer support initiatives) at those who are facing adverse circumstances or are excluded from mainstream services (Stanley et al., 2015a). This is due to both their presumed vulnerability to experiencing violence and abuse and a lack of access to, or engagement in, mainstream provision.
- 5.4 The terms 'disadvantaged' and 'marginalised' were broadly defined within the project outline but local partnerships were identified on the basis that they had experience of engaging young people with complex needs and those facing adverse circumstances. The initial choice of sites (by AVA) was

designed to engage a diverse range of young people – recognising different services had particular experience with distinct groups of young people.

- 5.5 **Model 1:** Plans for recruiting participants to the peer education projects (site one and two) took place through Platform 51's existing networks. Targeted service users included young parents; those not in education, employment or training; those at risk of exclusion, and BME young women, all of whom formed a core component of existing Platform 51 service users in each site. These intentions are reflected in the project's demographic data⁴.
- 5.6 **Model 2:** Plans for recruiting participants for the youth leadership projects differed significantly across the four (subsequently three sites) in line with the nature of the communities in which they were based and cohorts they had experience of working with. The intention was that across the sites this model would engage participants through "*local youth offending services; looked after children services; pupil referral units, local community centres; and sexual health services, as well as any specialist DV services*" (AVA initial project bid, 2013). With the exception of youth offending services (due to the termination of work in site six) the project appeared to meet these aims drawing participants from diverse referral routes with the majority identifying as experiencing some form of disadvantage or marginalisation.
- 5.7 Across the five active sites different strategies were employed to meet the aim of engaging disadvantaged and marginalised young people. These are explored below alongside particular challenges identified in targeting engagement in this way.

Factors which supported engagement of marginalised young people

Ethnicity

- 5.8 Across the five sites, data collected showed that approximately 33% of primary and secondary participants were from BME communities (site one (35%); Site two (full data unavailable); three (24%); four (28%); and five (15%).
- 5.9 Targeted work in site one (an area with higher than average white British population 94% vs. 86% nationally⁵) resulted in particularly high representation of BME young people from a local south Asian community (33% n= 11). Staff and young people in this site described specifically targeting work to promote inclusion of these young people, who were identified by local staff as particularly excluded from existing local DSV awareness work or less likely to identify with the issue.
- "One of our groups being aimed at a [South Asian] community, it's a much harder to reach group of young women, who perhaps don't necessarily identify straight away with domestic violence happening within their community... These young women in the beginning were saying, 'it just doesn't happen in our community at all' to actually 'it does happen but it's unheard of' to actually talking about it."* (Practitioner 3, site one)
- 5.10 Effective strategies involved training two peer mentors from the community at an early stage, who then delivered a peer education group-work programme specifically targeted at young women from their community. This partnership approach was noted to support the development of a safe space in which to discuss culturally specific aspects of the subject matter –identified as a unique opportunity for young women from this community. Culture specific issues relating to DSV and associated stigma were addressed directly by peer mentors who engaged in 'problem solving' to address these issues:

"The peer mentors [from this community] felt that there would be some challenges particularly in getting some of the young women that they want to target , to talk about the

⁴ Detailed demographic data by site is available from the project and research team upon request.

⁵ Source ONS (2011)

issues and to recognise the issues. Because they said it's just so very taboo that people wouldn't talk about them. So [the worker] kind of gave the group a challenge if you like, of how are we going to- ? I don't want them embarrassed; I don't want them made to feel like they've got to say things or whatever. So we talked about that a little bit and out of that merged the idea of creating two characters. So that we can storyline two characters with little events that happen each week, that the group can have a discussion about, and can make a decision about. So we've had fun in ordering these two very large pop up women/girls, these cardboard cut outs." (Practitioner 1, site one)

Parental status

- 5.11 29% of participants (n=24) across the five sites were parents, although significantly over half of these young people (n=15) were based in site one – a project which had specifically targeted and catered for young parents. The remainder of sites worked with between 2 – 4 participants who identified as parents.
- 5.12 For site one, success in engaging young people who were parents can be clearly linked to a number of practical steps which demonstrate the tangible ways in which 'inclusive practice' can be prioritised, and realised within the project. These included:
- Locating sessions in a space where a crèche service was possible/available
 - Funding provision of crèche facilities
 - Scheduling sessions at times convenient to participants
 - Provision of 'catch up sessions' for those unable to attend scheduled sessions
 - Emailing out notes and materials to all participants after sessions.

"All sessions have been run at agreed times of convenience with the peer mentors and crèche provision has been provided for the parents. Funds were secured so there is no cost to the peer mentors who wanted to attend ...opportunities for catch up sessions have also been provided for individuals who have been unable to make individual sessions. Update notes and materials for any sessions missed are provided by email to ensure all participants are included and not left behind." (Practitioner 2, site one)

Additional vulnerabilities

- 5.13 Relative to the general population the project engaged relatively high numbers of 'care experienced' young people in the project (20% of project participants versus <1% of the general population: Source NSPCC, 2016)⁶. This was a particularly significant factor for participants in site three where 60% of participants had some care experience. Although this was not an explicit target group of the site, the success in engaging this group was linked to the choice of referral routes (and the young women's housing initiative in particular) which were themselves successful in supporting young people from adverse circumstances.
- 5.14 Across the sites, the choice of referral routes represented a key means of ensuring the project engaged those traditionally excluded from mainstream provision. Homeless services; pupil referral units; targeted youth services and young parents groups were all identified as effective referral routes for engaging marginalised young people.

⁶ Experiences of care may be taken as a significant indicator of vulnerability given evidence of reasons for being taken into care (60% of children in care have experienced abuse or neglect, NSPCC, 2016) and the outcomes for young people in care (DfE, 2016).

- 5.15 In two sites practitioners reported that a majority of participants faced significant issues relating to emotional wellbeing. These were described to include: depression and anxiety, stress, lack of confidence, anger and a sense of powerlessness. Other significant presenting issues identified across the sites included young people who were not in education, employment or training; those with involvement in offending and those who were homeless or had insecure housing.
- 5.16 Although direct experiences of domestic or sexual violence were not captured in monitoring data there was significant evidence of participants facing a diverse range of adverse circumstances prior to and during engagement with the project including experience of domestic violence. In site one 5 out of 9 participants identified having experiences of unhealthy or violent relationships. In all three youth leadership sites (three, four and five) practitioners identified that all participants had some experience of domestic or sexual violence. In sites four and five practitioners described experiences of domestic violence as an explicit criteria for identifying potential participants, alongside other indicators of vulnerability or exclusion.
- 5.17 Just under half of participants questioned identified an explicit interest and motivation to engage with the project shaped by such experiences.

"My own personal experiences of domestic abuse made me intrigued and I wanted to help make other people my age aware of what domestic abuse actually is. Again it was my own experience of mental health services and the want to help improve them for young people who are going through similar experiences." (Case Study C, site three)

Challenges

- 5.18 A number of practitioners highlighted specific impacts of targeting the project at young people with multiple or complex needs and/or experiences of adversity. In particular they noted the impact on engagement levels and the subsequent need to work flexibly with a consideration of young people's diverse needs.

"Working with young people can be quite chaotic, especially if they've got all sorts of other issues and they've got to be in all sorts of different places, lots of them are working, they're going to college, they're young mums, they've got all these other things going on so one of the challenges has been trying to get the young people to be able to attend sessions."
(Practitioner 6, site two)

- 5.19 The nature of the challenges of engaging young people included:

Young people not identifying with the issues of DSV: practitioners recognised that many young people may not have seen the relevance of DSV to themselves or friends or else, understandably, chosen not to undertake more focused work in this area.

Competing priorities for young people engaged with multiple services: practitioners noted that all young people are likely to have multiple 'pulls' on their time including education or training; recreation, family and their peer groups. For young people facing adverse circumstances or with additional vulnerabilities there are likely to be further competing priorities in terms of caring responsibilities, multiple service engagement and/or managing crisis – all of which may prevent their ability to engage in an additional project.

Transport and timing: linked to the competing priorities described above the timing of the project was not suitable for all those who wished to take part or meant attendance was sometimes disrupted. In two sites transport to project activities was also an issue –due to both a rural setting (site five) and trying to engage participants from two adjacent but distinct localities (site three).

Responding to crises: For a number of young people, the nature of their living or family

circumstances or additional vulnerabilities meant that either prior to, or during engagement with the project, they faced significant crises which directly impacted on their ability to participate in the project. While some of these could be managed and accommodated within the project, for others this understandably prevented further engagement.

Caring responsibilities: Several young people involved in the project were young parents and so had to prioritise caring responsibilities and organise involvement in the project around this. Depending on the nature of resources available in each site this had variable impacts on attendance or involvement.

Education, training or work commitments: As noted above, the majority of participants had some engagement with education or training and a small number had volunteer work or employment which they needed to organise project involvement around - particularly in those sites where the project was not directly delivered in partnership with an educational setting.

Young people with short term engagement with the referring project: In some sites, young people's engagement with the project was dependent upon their involvement with the referring project (as for example in site four where primary participants were all attending the Pupil Referral Unit). In these cases when young people moved on from attending the referring project it became more challenging to maintain their involvement with the project.

Limitations to participant diversity

Gender

5.20 Although the original bid aimed to engage young women and men, there were aspects of the project design which resulted in a bias towards inclusion of young women, these include:

- The partnership with Platform 51 (to deliver model 1), an organisation with a remit to work with young women only.
- Observations by practitioners in sites three, four and five that young men were less ready to proactively identify an interest in DSV. This may be associated with evidence that young men are significantly less likely to have been victims of domestic or sexual abuse⁷ (Berelowitz et al., 2013) although it is also acknowledged that there is likely to be significant under-reporting of DSV against men of all ages (McNaughton Nicholls et al., 2014).
- The discontinuation of work in site six which was specifically intended to engage young men.

5.21 One important issue identified in both sites four and site six was the challenge of engaging male participants with histories of perpetrating domestic or sexual violence (DSV). The appropriateness and safety of asking these young men to become youth leaders and educators on DSV, before accessing more in-depth opportunities to deal with their own related offending behaviour was questioned. In both sites it was decided that the project was not appropriate for this cohort who needed alternative forms of provision supporting them to address DSV. In site six this proved to be an insurmountable barrier to the project proceeding whereas in site four (who also had the opportunity to engage young women) this was addressed by signposting potential participants to an alternative project '*Becoming a Man*'.

"They're all girls [in the project], we have had some boys that were interested but they're perpetrators of violence, they're actually not appropriate. So C and M that work in my team, they've been doing a group with them called BAM, Becoming A Man, and that basically looks at their attitude about women and where these attitudes come from, and how we can challenge them, but in a safe way." (Practitioner, site four)

⁷ Current evidence suggests that between 1/4 and 1/3 of child sexual exploitation service users are male although it is noted that there is likely to be significant under-reporting

- 5.22 Arguably this is an area that justifies further exploration – both in terms of the experiences of few male primary participants (6% n=5) and additional considerations required to engage more young men in future work to address DSV.

Disability

- 5.23 Demographic data demonstrated that the project had successfully engaged with a slightly 'above average' proportion of young people with disabilities (11% of all participants) compared to the wider population. This was mostly accounted for by participants from two sites. The data that was available was not disaggregated by type of disability and little additional information about the needs or experiences of these young people was shared or available. Given evidence that disability may increase children's vulnerability to experiencing forms of abuse (including sexual violence) by around three times (Miller and Brown, 2014) this may be an area where future work should consider more targeted strategies to increase representation and engagement.

Engagement and motivation

- 5.24 At the outset of the project participants were asked reasons for engaging with the project (via the DV Learning scale form and focus groups). The most common responses from the DV learning form are listed below:

Most common responses to question about initial hopes (DV Learning scale n = 36)	
Hope	Unique mentions
Developing confidence	19
Developing skills	14
Increased awareness of domestic violence	13
Helping others to stay safe	13
Helping self to stay safe	8
Attaining accreditation	7
Most common responses to question about initial fears (DV Learning scale n=36)	
Fear	Unique mentions
None	14
Being judged or criticised by other participants	14
Being upset due to sensitivities of the subject matter	6
Not being able to attend all the sessions	4

Fig 2: Initial hopes and fears captured on DV learning scale form

- 5.25 These findings were strongly supported by messages from the five initial focus groups (one per site). Across the focus groups the three most commonly mentioned motivations for engagement in order were: developing confidence; improved knowledge of DSV and helping others. Additional themes (not mentioned above) included help to access employment. The three most commonly mentioned fears about engagement highlighted in the focus groups and on initial DV Learning Scale questionnaires were: being judged by others; sensitivities of the subject matter and being bored.

6. FINDINGS: Impact on participant wellbeing

Key Messages

- Self-reports from young people across all five sites identified three main ways in which the project benefitted their emotional wellbeing. These can be characterised as: improved confidence and self-efficacy; improved social networks; and increased access to further opportunities (including training, employment and education and support). These messages were supported by evidence from other stakeholders.
- Improved confidence and self-efficacy were the most strongly evidenced outcome relating to young people's wellbeing. They were associated with exposure to new opportunities and challenges; responsibility for presenting to or teaching others; acknowledgment and accreditation; and group based learning.
- Improved social networks, included enhanced peer support, were associated with the group based learning model and inclusion of personal/social development within the curriculum.
- Young people's access to further opportunities were supported by strong relationships with practitioners through which signposting and referral took place. This outcome was also linked to participants improved confidence and being able to evidence their achievements.
- Across the five sites 52 young people (87% of participants for whom this opportunity was available) received a minimum of one accreditation (47 received two).

- 6.1 An anticipated outcome of the project was that "*young people directly taking part in the project report improved emotional wellbeing and peer support*". The key question relating to this impact theme was:

Whether and in what ways the project:

- *Enhances young people's wellbeing*

- 6.2 Available data indicated that across the five sites, at the outset of the project, mental health and emotional wellbeing were a significant issue for a majority of project participants, as described in section 5. 15.
- 6.3 Young people across all five sites commonly identified three main related ways in which the project benefitted their emotional wellbeing. These can be characterised as: improved confidence and self-efficacy; improved social networks; and increased access to further opportunities (including training, employment and education and support). The evidence for these outcomes was strongly supported by practitioners and where captured, external stakeholders known to the young people.
- 6.4 Outcomes relating to specific mental health issues such as anxiety or depression were not possible to evidence within the scope of this evaluation. Outcomes associated with improved safety, through increased awareness of domestic violence, are dealt with separately in chapter 7.

Improved confidence and self-efficacy

- 6.5 The most commonly identified impact on participants' wellbeing related to improved confidence, and related benefits such as an improved sense of self-efficacy and increased empathy and tolerance of alternative perspectives.

- 6.6 As noted in section 5.24 opportunities to develop confidence were identified as a primary motivation for young people when first engaging with the project and were also an anticipated benefit of the project:

"I don't want to give [young people] unrealistic expectations but I want them to have more confidence and self-belief, which is something they're really lacking in, these young people and no-one really ever tells them that they matter or that their voices can be heard."
(Project coordinator)

- 6.7 The majority of participants, across all five sites, reported increasing confidence as a significant personal outcome of their participation in the project. Evidence for participants improved confidence was identified as a personal outcome in self-reported data via case studies; focus groups and feedback forms and strongly supported by the observations of the majority of practitioners interviewed. As well as being valued in its own right, confidence was also highlighted as supporting young people's access to further opportunities such as volunteering, work or training.

- 6.8 Within evidence gathered for the evaluation, increasingly confidence was predominantly associated with exposure to new opportunities (as opposed to therapeutic work to build self-esteem). Several participants (n=7) described opportunities presented by the project as challenging ('testing', 'challenging', 'difficult') and for these young people improved confidence was associated with a process of overcoming these difficulties and discovering new abilities. Presenting work publicly or teaching other young people was a commonly identified aspect of the project that was anticipated by participants to prove particularly challenging. At the outset of the project several participants expressed scepticism that they could achieve this.

"Before I thought I don't think I could do it [present in public], I thought I'd be too nervous, I wouldn't be able to talk around people but I think I've proven to myself that I can talk to people." (Young person, site two)

- 6.9 For others confidence was associated with acknowledgements and accreditation received as a result of work completed or outputs produced:

"My confidence has been the biggest factor that I have learned. At the beginning I didn't think I could complete a six week course but [I] have overcome this and my confidence grew more every week. I am able to speak confidently to more people and not to doubt myself." (Young person, site three)

- 6.10 The group based nature of the project was also identified by three groups of young people (sites one, two and five) as a means of improving young people's self-confidence, enabling feedback, encouragement and support within peer groups. Given the fears that many young people expressed about group-work at the outset of the project (see section 5.24) this indicates that practitioners were able to create safe and supportive groups through which to deliver the project.

"I have learnt that I am a good listener and that people also listen to what I have to say which has really helped my confidence." (Participant - six monthly monitoring form, site one).

- 6.11 As noted above, young people's self-reports of improved confidence, resulting from the project, were supported by observations of practitioners in all five sites and other stakeholders. In sites four and five practitioners noted residential weekends as moments of significant change, providing opportunities to work intensively, progress the project work and deepen trust and reflection among participants.

"Watching [one young woman] in particular change over the weekend and starting out from that viewpoint that no-one cares, to developing an amazing action plan for a campaign that they wanted to run and to see her face light up when I gave her some praise around

something, was really good and then to hear from the youth work staff a few weeks later, how her behaviour and everything has totally changed since that weekend.” (Project coordinator)

- 6.12 As indicated by the quote above, an associated outcome was evidence that for some young people involvement in the project increased their sense of self-efficacy – the belief that they had the ability to affect change for themselves or others. This was associated with aspects of the project that sought to support or influence others, helping young people identify opportunities for influencing tangible change. While this merits further research, there is a suggestion here of an association between the peer support/influencing models and improved emotional wellbeing for individuals who participated. This also supports findings from existing research and evaluation on peer support to address violence and abuse (Hagel, 2013).

“[Being involved in the project] has increased my self-esteem and aided my recovery as it has given me a focus and a sense of achievement as well as giving me aspirations to use my experiences and understanding to continue helping others in similar situations and improve current mental health services and young people's general understanding of domestic abuse.” (Case study C, young person, site three)

“Young people need groups like this to empower themselves and others to make a difference. I firmly believe that to change the world you have to start locally and similar projects help people have the confidence to make positive changes in their lives and in other peoples’. Teenagers and young people are poorly depicted in the media and it can be difficult for them to be happy and confident in today's consumerist and technological society. It is vital to give them opportunities to work together for something good.” (Case study M, young person, site one)

- 6.13 As well as a valuable personal outcome, developing/fostering young people's sense of self-efficacy was also identified as a mechanism which supported wider change and created sustainable impacts in young people's lives.

“The highlight [for me] is getting the opportunity to deliver a project and spread the message. The project has empowered me and in turn will hopefully empower others which is really exciting.” (Case study M, - young person, site one)

Improved social networks

- 6.14 As noted above and in section 5.24 the most commonly cited fear young people mentioned about involvement in the project related to the anticipation of difficult or challenging relationships with other young people, specifically a fear of being 'judged' or criticised by others. During two focus groups a number of young people specifically referred to previous 'uncomfortable' experiences of group-work or self-identified that they 'didn't work well in groups of people my age' (sites two and five).
- 6.15 Contrary to these fears, the evaluation found strong evidence that participants developed improved social networks as a result of involvement in the project. This was identified as a theme in young people's self-reported data, focus groups in all five sites and supported by practitioner and partners observations. The development of positive relationships within the groups was identified as both an outcome and a factor helping to sustain young people's engagement through the project. In addition a small number of young people identified the value of meeting young people who had been through similar experiences as a means of countering their sense of isolation and difference.

“I usually keep myself to myself but being in this group has helped me to make new friends and opened myself up to new opportunities.” (Young person, site four)

"I think it's a lot more than just about domestic violence. For a lot of us it was like a support unit as well, to bring people out of their shells and being more confident with some of them." (Young person, site five).

"[I know] that I'm not alone, that there's other people that have been through the same thing as you." (Young person, site three)

"We now socialise outside of the group and bonded through learning together and experiencing things in the group together." (Young person, site three)

"I would definitely recommend young people get involved in a project like this! You will meet like-minded, lovely people and you will gain the skills and confidence to achieve the things you want in your life. Opportunities like these need to be taken with both hands." (Young person, site two)

- 6.16 A related point pertained to young people's ability to work with others and accommodate diverse views or styles of working. Several young people (n= 9) reported that engagement with the project, and the group based nature of the work had improved their tolerance and ability to support others. As one woman in site five explained:

"You learn how to connect with different people and how to, not adapt yourself - you should never adapt yourself for someone else - but, I don't know, I don't know how to explain it. You have louder people and quieter people and you learn how to approach them in the right way." (Young person, site five)

- 6.17 Given that many of the circumstances that participants faced (e.g. parenthood; exclusion from school; care experiences; mental health diagnoses) are commonly associated with an increased sense of isolation, improvements to young people's social networks and/or their ability to engage in groups is potentially significant and may be worth exploring in more detail in future evaluations or research.

Improved access to further opportunities (training, education, employment or other forms of support)

- 6.18 A small number of participants in sites one, two, three and four⁸ identified access to new opportunities (relating to training, education and/or employment) which they explicitly attributed to involvement in the project. This was supported by observations from practitioners who identified the following opportunities enabled by the project:

- access to support with CV and job application development (n=3)
- access to work and volunteering opportunities (n=3)
- help with choices about future study, employment or training (n=1)
- research experience and mentoring from a volunteer evaluator (n=4)

- 6.19 Comments from young people supporting these observations also highlighted transferable skills developed, or built on, through engagement with the project and which they identified as useful for future training, education or employment.

"Just recently with the help of [my worker] I have been looking at other volunteering opportunities that I might take up. The project has been really helpful to me, as my confidence has grown." (Young person, site three)

⁸ Although this was not identified in site five this does not preclude the possibility that this occurred.

"I have learnt to have confidence in myself and my delivery and content of my sessions. That I can work well in a team, organise my work and work for deadlines. I hope to use all I have learnt in my new job in a secondary school, especially the peer mentoring to try and help as many young people that I can." (Case study K, site one)

"I'm a lot more confident and it's helped me to be where I want to be in my career, like I said earlier about I've got a job now. I guess in a way it's kind of pushed me." (Young person, Site two)

"One young woman has been accepted by a local domestic abuse volunteer support service to undertake ten weeks of training - two days per week, training to become a volunteer mentor with women who are currently in abusive relationships." (Practitioner 3, site one)

6.20 In site four (a PRU) school attendance data showed evidence of improved attendance rates for all but one of the students engaged in the project (n=12). Observations by wider school staff supported the idea that participation in the project impacted positively on students' wider engagement in school life. Although these observations are noteworthy, given the small sample size and complexity of student's lives, it is not possible to solely attribute these improvements to involvement in the project.

6.21 Across the project (in two sites) there were four examples provided of how the project supported young people to access more therapeutic or social care support. In one case (site four) this stemmed from a number of disclosures about experiences of abuse which emerged within (and as a result of) the project work. Appropriate referrals were subsequently made. In site one, a participant planned to take on a related volunteer post, her involvement prompted her to access a therapeutic group-work programme to address past experiences of abuse.

"There's one woman who [was previously] on a therapeutic programme and she's decided to re-join that [as a result of AVA]. Not because she's feeling more vulnerable... more because she's actually very clear now in her own mind that she'd actually like to work towards employment in that area of work .. she's got a volunteer place at a domestic violence support centre." (Practitioner 1, site one)

6.22 All primary participants in the project (n=60) were also given the opportunity to gain two accreditations. 52 young people in total gained one accreditation (87%), and the majority (n=47) gained two. The nature of awards varied slightly across the two models. Model 1 offered OCN accredited 'Domestic Violence Awareness' and 'Peer mentoring' Awards; and model 2 offered ASDAN accredited 'Personal and Social Development' and 'Leadership' Awards.

Area	DV Awareness or Personal and Social Development Awards	Leadership or Peer Mentoring Awards
Site one	9 (DVA)	9 (PM)
Site two	4 (DVA)	4 (PM)
Site three	13 (PSDA)	18 (LA)
Site four	10 (PSDA)	10 (LA)
Site five	11 (PSDA)	11 (LA)
Total	47	52

Fig 3: Accreditation awarded by site

Potential negative impacts on participants' emotional wellbeing

- 6.23 Alongside the many positive impacts on participants' wellbeing, a small minority of participants (n=3) noted the potential for aspects of the project to feel distressing or overwhelming at times. All three of these participants spoke favourably of their involvement in the project and identified personal benefits but also acknowledged particular sensitivities relating to the subject matter and the need for those delivering the project to be aware of this. This was noted by one young woman as particularly significant for those with a direct history of domestic or sexual violence.

“Interviewer: What message would you give to professionals who are thinking of running another similar project in a different town?”

To run the group but be mindful that some people may be triggered or upset by things that are discussed and include some sessions that are less heavy work wise to make sure that the pressure isn't too much for the young people.” (Case Study C, site three)

Summary reflections: factors which support or hinders improved emotional wellbeing

- 6.24 Based on the available evidence there was no indication of significant differences in outcomes between the two different project models. Evidence collected from all five sites identified similar broad themes, with improvements to participants' self-confidence and self-efficacy as the strongest theme in each site, despite significant differences in their contexts and delivery. Other ways in which the project appears to support participants' well-being was through improving access to social networks, peer support and facilitating access to wider opportunities.
- 6.25 Evidence about if and how the project held wider therapeutic benefits, and supported young people to address some of the mental health issues both they and practitioners identified (such as depression or anxiety) was not available within the scope of this evaluation (see section 2.12 for further details).
- 6.26 Overall, data pertaining to participants' improved emotional wellbeing identified a number of aspects of project delivery associated with these outcomes. They include: the use of group-work (for extending social networks and developing young people's team working skills); the development of strong relationships between young people and practitioners (through which encouragement, support, advice and information about further opportunities were accessed); opportunities for young people to demonstrate presentation and leadership skills (as a means of developing skills and confidence); and opportunities for young people to gain accreditation (to support young people's access to additional training, education and employment opportunities). More detailed analysis of these and other causal relationships are beyond the scope of this evaluation but they are presented here as suggested aspects of the project model, which show promise for improving participants wellbeing and are worthy of further exploration in related future evaluations.

7. FINDINGS: Impact on participant knowledge and understanding of domestic and sexual violence

Key Messages

- The evaluation found strong evidence that participation in the project contributed to improved awareness and understanding of domestic violence for both primary and secondary participants
- Evidence of improvements in knowledge and understanding of domestic violence include: recognition of broader forms of behaviours that constitute abuse; increased empathy towards victims and knowledge of strategies and services to support those affected
- Evidence from young people, practitioners and local project outputs demonstrate confident communication of key messages to wider audiences
- Opportunities for primary participants to 'cascade learning' to their peers helped embed learning.

- 7.1 A key anticipated benefit of participation in the project, as stated in the initial funding application, was that *"young people directly taking part .. and their peers demonstrate improved understanding of domestic and sexual violence, accessing support and advising friends"*. The key question relating to this impact theme was:

Whether and in what ways the project:

- *improves young people's awareness and understanding of domestic and sexual violence*

- 7.2 Across the five sites and multiple stakeholders (participants, practitioners, campaign audience members, partners) evidence was identified demonstrating that a significant majority of participants had increased knowledge and understanding of DSV as a result of participation in the project. A summary of this evidence shows that:

- 88% of primary participants whose knowledge was measured using the DV Learning Scale (n=32) show improved awareness, confidence and understanding of domestic violence as result of participation in the project. Of the remaining 12% (n=4), 5 demonstrated no change (less than +/- 1) and one showed a dip in score.
- The majority of participants identified improved knowledge of domestic violence as a key outcome of on-going involvement in the project through focus groups, case studies and feedback forms.
- Local project outputs, developed and delivered by participants (films, presentations, exhibitions and research) and reviewed by the evaluators, were judged to demonstrate sound knowledge of domestic violence and confidence communicating key messages with others.
- Practitioner and project partners support these findings, describing primary participants' *'significantly improved knowledge of domestic violence'* and their confidence to communicate these issues as a result of participation in the project.
- The majority of secondary participants in site three, surveyed after one off sessions delivered by primary participants, said they *'knew more about teenage relationship abuse'* (56%, n =119) and had *'improved knowledge of where to access help and support'* (71%, n=151) as a result of the session.

7.3 Two caveats are noted for these findings:

- Improvements in knowledge and understanding primarily relate to domestic violence rather than sexual violence. Although there was evidence that sexual violence was addressed within the project, and there is considerable overlap between the two issues, particularly in relation to consent, there was markedly less evidence of a focus on this topic and the distance travelled tools did not specifically address this. Unless otherwise specified the majority of findings described in this chapter related to improved understanding of domestic violence.
- Evidence of improvements in participants' knowledge and awareness were captured at different points in participants' engagement with the project. Therefore no assumptions can be made about participants' retention of this increased knowledge/awareness, the longer term impacts or if these improvements were exclusively due to engagement in the project.

7.4 Findings from the DV Learning Scale (highlighted below) suggest that participants' improvements in knowledge and confidence were most significant in relation to: talking to peers about domestic violence and helping peers stay safe within an abusive relationship. The next most significant improvements related to confidence speaking about domestic violence in a group; knowledge of how to stay safe within an intimate relationship; and knowledge about the law (See fig 4). Questions where slightly less significant increases in improvements were recorded appear to result from areas where participants' knowledge (or confidence) was initially recorded as higher.

Average DV Learning Scale results (n=36)

Statement	Average score at start of project (T1) (out of score of 5)	Average score at 'end' (or part way through) project (T2) (out of score of 5)	Increase
Key: 1 Strongly disagree; 2 Mostly disagree; 3 Neither agree or disagree; 4 Mostly Agree; 5 Strongly Agree			
I know about the effects of domestic violence on victims/survivors.	4.2	4.8	0.6
I can confidently talk about domestic violence in a group.	3.5	4.7	1.2
I have a good understanding of what domestic violence is.	3.9	4.5	0.6
I know what to do if a friend or family member experiences violence or abuse	3.7	4.7	1
I know what the early warning signs are for domestic violence	4.1	4.7	0.6
I know how to help someone plan to keep themselves safe in an abusive relationship.	2.9	4.3	1.4
I can talk about domestic violence to my friends.	2.5	4.2	1.7
I understand the different types of domestic violence people use in relationships.	2.9	3.9	1
I know how to stay safe within an intimate relationship	3.6	4.8	1.2
I can talk about domestic violence to my family members	3.9	4.6	0.7
I know about the law relating to domestic violence	3	4.2	1.2
I feel confident talking to others about domestic violence.	3.8	4.8	1
TOTAL	42	54.2	12.2

Fig 4: Average domestic violence Learning Scale results (n=36)

- 7.5 Participants reported variable past experience of domestic violence education. While a small number of young people (5) noted previously receiving domestic violence education, the majority highlighted the absence of prior opportunities. There is evidence that, regardless of prior experience, the project enabled participants to increase knowledge and understanding of domestic violence. Practitioners and young people noted that the breadth of the project's content and engagement with local and national services represented a distinct learning opportunity.

"I think I thought I knew more than I did and then [through the project] I've heard of things that I never even knew while I've been here." (Focus group, site three)

"I think because I suffered quite a lot of domestic abuse with my ex, and then I've done like loads of different courses since, so for me I kind of feel like I did have quite a lot of knowledge...I suppose like the contrast was that [during the project] I got quite a lot of knowledge from other people's perspectives [and] I learnt quite a lot about different agencies that I didn't know about ... I've gained quite a lot of knowledge there, but the actual, like what domestic abuse is, I don't think I gained that much because I kind of had quite a lot. Does that make sense?" (Focus group: site two)

- 7.6 Through analysis of participant interviews, focus groups and feedback forms⁹ there was evidence that participants improved their awareness of, and confidence speaking about, DSV in five distinct, though related ways. Each is briefly explored below.

An improved ability to identify signs and indicators of domestic violence

- 7.7 During interviews and focus groups in each site, the majority of primary and secondary participants reported that involvement in the project supported them to recognise signs or indicators of abuse, both in relation to their own relationships and those of others. For some young people this aligned to improved knowledge of their own rights, including those relating to consent. Across the five sites, 16 primary participants (27%) explicitly acknowledged the personal relevance of this knowledge for themselves and peers, although evidence from practitioners suggested this may be true for a far larger number of participants. As illustrated below, in some instances young people were also able to identify the direct protective potential of this knowledge.

"Throughout the course I have learned so much knowledge about domestic violence and to see warning signs. I am able to support and help friends and family if these issues ever arise." (Case study, site one)

"I didn't know the signs of domestic violence before it progresses but now I do - but if I'd known before maybe I wouldn't have got in a domestic violence situation." (Young person, site two)

"Interviewer: would you recommend that other young people take part in this?"

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Why would you recommend it?

Respondent 1: So they can learn about it and not get themselves into that situation." (Focus group, site three)

"Interviewer: What do you think you've learnt about yourself since you came, since you started doing the project?"

Respondent 3: That I don't have to do something if I don't want. (Focus group, site four)

"I learned that I was - I felt it was a little bit hard hitting - I learned that I was actually in a type of domestic relationship myself, abusive relationship, which I didn't actually realise

⁹ See appendices for example of feedback form (incorporated into Domestic Violence Learning Scale)

before. I just thought it was just said person was just insecure or something, but no it was actually quite unhealthy. It got me out of that." (Focus group: site five)

- 7.8 Further evidence of participants' understanding of the 'signs' of domestic violence were also demonstrated through the outputs produced by young people in each site, including events attended by members of the evaluation team (See for example site one: Postcard campaign; site two: Power-point presentation and script; site three, four and five : Films¹⁰)

Recognition of broader forms of behaviours that can constitute domestic violence and the complexities

- 7.9 A related finding was that involvement in the project increased participants' understanding of the variety of forms domestic violence may take and challenged the normalisation of patterns of abuse. More specifically the project clearly challenged common misunderstandings, cited within wider research (Carlsen and Wodden, 2006; Reid et al., 2014) that domestic violence is characterised by the presence of physical violence. Evidence collected in each site demonstrated how the project enabled participants to challenge and question this idea and recognise other forms of coercive control such as economic abuse.

"Certain things that you knew about that you didn't think were domestic violence but now you know...Like what people go through, -your friends and now you know what it actually is and that it's not normal....actually I don't think [before the project] I knew much. I thought it was normal to be like that." (Focus group, site four)

"I thought it was just hitting, I thought domestic abuse was just like smacking. Especially I didn't know that so many people had gone through it as well." (Focus group, site five)

"I really didn't know much about it, all I thought was just that they talk to you like crap and push you around, where it's not really like that 'cause it can be everything. Like if they don't give you money..." (Focus group, site two)

"When we learned about how many types of violence there were. It's like people don't realise how many points in life that people can target you on, it's like people only think "oh yeah, if they hit me then that's abuse but he hasn't hit me so he isn't abusing me". But there's like, there's loads of things that they can do to hide the fact that they're being violent, if you're not aware of it." (Focus group, site two)

- 7.10 Similarly, wider research also highlights that public attitudes and beliefs about domestic violence are less likely to recognise male victims. For some participants, knowledge of the wider context (e.g. statistics of those affected) and the diversity of those at risk were particularly striking aspects of their learning.

"Some of us had done a domestic violence course before so we knew about it- so not much changed. But others they learned more about it – the stats in particular –we were taken aback by the stats on men who experience domestic violence". (Focus group, site two)

Recognition of the impact of abuse and of the vulnerabilities of victims

- 7.11 An additional aspect of participants' learning from the project was increased understanding of the multiple ways in which domestic violence impacted on individuals physically and psychologically including impacts on children who lived in families or homes where domestic violence occurred.

¹⁰ See AVA Prevention Platform for more details (forthcoming) <http://www.preventionplatform.co.uk/>

Several participants described how the project shifted attitudes towards those affected by domestic violence, increasing their empathy and understanding, and described developing understanding of why leaving abusive relationships may be challenging for practical and/or psychological reasons. Communicating these messages to others was also a central component of young people's outputs in each site.

"I didn't really know the effects of it, I knew what it were but I didn't know how much it really ruins someone and now I do, it's different." (Focus group, site three)

"You realise how hard it really is to leave relationships, especially if you have children. It's not as easy as just calling the police, or going to a refuge because you need to protect yourself and you are more in danger when you do leave." (Case Study M, site one)



Site one: example postcard from series produced by Project participants

Knowledge of strategies for supporting peers or family members affected by abuse

7.12 Participants across all five sites associated participation in the project to an improved ability to identify a range of practical strategies, advice and appropriate local resources to help others. This included knowledge of resources such as telephone helplines and local refuges and strategies such as 'safety planning'. In all five sites project activities to support this involved primary participants engaging directly with local support and advice services including trips to visit local refuges and meetings with specialist workers. Several young people identified these visits as unique, memorable and highly valued opportunities.

"The main message I would give someone if they were in a relationship which was abusive is to start by telling someone you trust. Agree a code word or action with your friend so she can help you if you are unable to get it yourself. You will feel less isolated and it might help you take the steps to be free and happy again. Contact Women's Aid or the NSPCC if you're under 18 and chat to them for practical advice." (Case study M, site one)

Confidence communicating key messages with others

7.13 Finally there was evidence that participants' developing knowledge and awareness of domestic violence was coupled with increased confidence to discuss these issues with others. As noted in

section 5.24, almost half of those surveyed (36%, n=13) described influencing and supporting peers as one of their hopes for involvement in the project. As one practitioner explained:

"One of the things that initial group were quite keen to say is that 'we never had any of this sort of stuff at school', 'why don't young people know what's going on and talk about these things?', so their initial idea was wanting to get out into school and colleges and the awareness raising sessions we'd given them, they wanted to deliver to other young people."
(Practitioner, site three)

7.14 In all sites, an element of the project involved primary participants sharing their knowledge and ideas publically with others including peers, practitioners, policy makers or community members. This 'learning transfer' was delivered in three different ways across the sites:

- Through a structured peer education project (sites one and two)
- Through 'one off' awareness raising sessions to young people (tertiary participants) in a variety of settings, including schools; national citizenship service; children's homes; a secure unit, and sixth form colleges (Sites three, four and five), and
- Through production of resources (drama, photography and film) to disseminate key messages and learning to wider community based audiences through resources (Sites one, three, four and five).

7.15 This element of the project and the need for participants to be able to communicate their knowledge clearly and accurately was described by practitioners as an important motivation for learning. This supported findings from related research about the value of '*learning by doing*' (Stanley et al., 2015a), embedding participants' learning through teaching others.

"Obviously you learn a lot about abuse and you're not just teaching them, you are teaching yourself on what not to do and how to see it." (Focus group, site two)

"Changing people's attitudes is one of the things I'd like to get out of [involvement in the project]." (Focus group, site three)

7.16 Furthermore there was some evidence that participants in the project developed confidence and motivation to share their learning with family and peers on a more informal basis, as well as through the formal opportunities developed within the project. Specific examples were given of young people's desire to influence others, following involvement in the project and opportunistic ways in which they engaged in these behaviours.

"I've probably got more opinions on it now whereas before I didn't really have a strong opinion on it whereas now, yeah you kind of argue about it when someone kinda defends abuse...I didn't really know the effects of it, I knew what it were but I didn't know how much it really ruins someone and now I do, it's different." (Focus group, site four)

"it [domestic violence] just gets my back up more than it ever did and if anyone like then says something about it, like kinda defending it, I've already started arguing." (Focus group, site three)

Site one: Case study: young people's role in designing peer education

As part of the development of a peer education programme, peer educators from site one discussed the challenges of talking about sensitive subject matter with other young people. They identified the potential for inhibition or discomfort, and the particular relevance of these concerns for those from a local BME community. They subsequently developed an innovative strategy to address this by focusing the awareness raising sessions they designed around two fictional characters. Peer educators produced life size dolls of the two characters and developed a story about domestic violence which was revealed to participants in weekly instalments as part of the sessions. Observations by practitioners and young people highlighted the value of the dolls in both creating a 'safe space' using 'third person' narratives and engaging participants through the use of characters whose stories they were observed to invest in.

Summary reflections: factors which support or hinder improved understanding of domestic and sexual violence

- 7.17 It would appear that despite diverse contexts, delivery styles and activities each site was successful in improving participants' knowledge and understanding of domestic violence and disseminating learning to wider groups of young people. While detailed analysis of the mechanisms which supported this learning is not possible, eight common themes were identified by young people and practitioners. These pertained to elements of the project which they felt supported this learning. These are:
- Existing organisational and staff expertise (and related resources)
 - Engaging wider resources from the local community (local experts, service visits, additional funding)
 - The creation of 'safe spaces' to discuss sensitive issues - including work within small, single gender groups and a welcoming and comfortable environment for project activities
 - An ability to provide longer term engagement rather than a short term intervention (a learning project, rather than one-off event)
 - Group based learning
 - The use of mixed and interactive methods which appealed to diverse learning styles – including the use of creative, discussion based activities.
 - 'Learning through doing': young people cascading their learning to others
 - The use of characters and vignettes to explore sensitive issues
- 7.18 In addition many young people and practitioners noted that the direct relevance of the subject matter to participants supported engagement and motivation.
- 7.19 The main factor that practitioners identified as being challenging in achieving this outcome was the absence of a structured 'curriculum' to facilitate the learning about DSV. Crucially there appeared to be a lack of clarity from some partners at the outset of the project about whether AVA would provide a structured 'curriculum' for this purpose. While it was AVA's intention that each site would develop their curriculum locally, building opportunities for ownership and flexibility, expectations about this appeared to differ and practitioners in at least three sites were initially unclear about this. This highlights one of the challenges for communication across a complex, multi-site project with different work practices, expectations and experience of delivering similar projects.
- 7.20 Although AVA was able to support sites with the development of these resources, for some practitioners this task was felt to present additional challenges that they had not factored into their planning. However for other practitioners the flexibility and potential for local site specific innovation was felt to be helpful. It is unclear whether the benefits of not providing a shared foundational curriculum across the five sites outweighed the additional challenges this presented for some and the implications on resources.

8. FINDINGS: Improved influence

Key Messages

- The project improved young people's skills to influence service development through the development of leadership and multi-media communication skills, subject specific knowledge and improved political awareness. This was particularly evident in model two although there was also limited evidence of this in model one.
- Through the project young people in each site produced multi-media *outputs* or *resources* (films, exhibitions, presentations) which became tools for campaigning and influencing. Young people in site three also produced a research report for the same purposes.
- Across the five sites, 49 young people are known to have taken part in activities which brought them face to face with policy makers and provided opportunities to voice their opinions and recommendations for improving service responses to DSV.
- Although young people's *ability* to influence was harder to evidence there was tangible evidence of the research produced by young people in site three eliciting a concrete commitment from local decision-makers to respond to its findings.
- Participants' ability to inform local services was in part determined by the existing relationships between the site and local decision makers.

- 8.1 Influencing the delivery of young people's services to address DSV was a key aim of the overall project: "*young people directly taking part in the project will increase their skills and abilities to influence the way young people's services are delivered.*" Although this was explicit within model 2 (youth leadership) it was apparent to a lesser degree within model 1 (peer education).
- 8.2 As noted in section 2.14, measuring attributable evidence of young people's influence on service design and delivery is methodological challenging when exploring social change or political influence (see Tuai et al., 2014), particularly in a small scale short term evaluation such as this. For this reason evidence gathered focused on identifying the presence of factors, attributable to the project, which may contribute to increased skills or abilities to influence service delivery, regardless of whether change actually occurred. These factors can be grouped as:
- Skills and knowledge: Young people's increased capacity for influencing
 - Resources designed and led by young people to inform and influence, and
 - Contexts in which young people can directly influence service delivery

Skills and knowledge: Young people's increased capacity for influencing

- 8.3 Unlike young people's interest in helping or influencing their peers, an interest in influencing policy makers or service development was not identified as a motivation for participation by participants who were surveyed or questioned at the outset of the project. A small number of practitioners reflected on this during interviews (n=3) and in all cases suggested that this was a particularly novel aspect of the project and prior to involvement young people were unlikely to recognise their capacity to influence change at a service or policy level, or have experience of doing so.

"When they [young people] were on their residential, one of the quotes that will stick with me is "David Cameron doesn't give a shit about us, so why are we bothering to learn about this because no-one wants to hear our voice?" (Project coordinator)

- 8.4 For young people characterised as marginalised (who the project targeted) opportunities to exert influence beyond immediate familial or social sphere may also be particularly limited (Bay and Blekesaune, 2002).
- 8.5 In all five sites, young people participated in activities which aimed to promote skills and knowledge for campaigning and influencing. These included leadership and multi-media communication skills, subject specific knowledge and improved political awareness. In sites one and two (model 1) this work primarily focused on influencing peers. However both sites also undertook additional activities which directly sought to raise awareness among policy makers, project managers and the wider public. This was undertaken through presentations to local policy makers (site two) and developing an exhibition to raise public awareness and understanding of domestic violence (site one).
- 8.6 Model 2 'youth leadership' (sites three, four, and five) explicitly supported young people to develop knowledge and skills to influence those responsible for developing and delivering young people's services. In partnership with a facilitator from Chilypep, each site engaged a cohort of young people in workshops focusing on leadership and influencing skills (sites four and five delivered these during a weekend residential). This included supporting young people through a practical process of designing their own 'campaign' to address DSV within their local area. This process was designed to provide participants with a strong sense of ownership over the project and enable them to inform the subsequent direction and activities of the project.

"I think the first group that they did, they developed their action plan and what they came up with was this idea of a PPI campaign, which stands for Protect, Promote and Improve, so protect young people, promote positive relationships and improve services, so that became their campaign and I think everything we've done since then has been under the banner of that." (External stakeholder, referral organisation, site three)

- 8.7 In total 39 young people across sites three, four ...4, and 5 completed these workshops and evidenced their knowledge and skills through achievement of an ASDAN accreditation in youth leadership.
- 8.8 Evidence for young people's increased capacity (skills and knowledge) to exert influence and understanding of policy structures and processes was also evidenced within qualitative data from focus groups, case studies and interviews. Specifically this data highlighted participants' increased understanding of local and national political structures, and direct contact with these structures.

"Even though the training itself wasn't overly exciting, I still enjoyed going. I learned a lot about domestic abuse in general, services available for people suffering from abuse, different campaigning methods and how to deliver focus groups. I had the opportunity to travel to London to visit the Houses of Parliament which was amazing, got to speak to people about the work that the group was doing and even got to know some very strong minded lovely people." (Case study 2, site three)

"I think they have learned over the course of the project, that their voices are being heard, even if it's just within the school context but I think they are understanding that it is wider than that, I was always really careful to tell them when I was going to speak to the Home Office or whatever it might be, that I was using their voice and their experience as my basis of what I was saying." (Project coordinator)

- 8.9 For 12?young people in site three, these skills were supplemented by an opportunity to develop research skills through the design and implementation of a project involving survey, focus group and

interview methods, undertaken with support from a volunteer evaluator (see 8.14 for further details). Additional multi-media campaigning skills (film-making and photography) were also developed by participants in sites one, three, four and five, all of whom worked with professional photographers or film-makers to develop outputs.

- 8.10 Over the course of the project, in all five sites, young people's developing skills and knowledge could be seen to help shift their relationship with the issue of domestic violence. Using a model for evaluating influence and advocacy proposed by Parish (no date) this movement can be characterised as a shift from: '*unengaged*' (don't know (or care) about the issue), to '*aware*' (know about the issue); to '*allies*' (individuals willing and able to take action on the issue when asked). For all primary participants involved in influencing activities (with peers, policy makers or practitioners) there is evidence that they made the shift to *allies* (n=50). In a smaller number of identifiable cases (n=3) there was also evidence of young people moving into the role of '*champions*' (individuals willing to work on the issue on their own impetus). These were young people who actively sought further opportunities to address domestic violence as a result their engagement with the project, through additional volunteering opportunities¹¹.

Resources designed and led by young people

- 8.11 In each of the five sites young people developed outputs in the form of presentations and/or multi-media campaign tools (photography exhibitions; postcards; films and research reports) that sought to raise awareness and understanding of domestic violence among wider groups of stakeholders. In the majority of cases the primary audiences for these outputs were other young people (see section 7.14) but in the majority of sites (n=4) professionals and those delivering services were also specifically targeted (see 8.12 for further details).

Contexts in which young people have the potential to influence service delivery

- 8.12 Alongside the need for young people to have skills and knowledge about how to influence service delivery, and produce outputs to support this, exerting influence also relies on the creation of contexts which bring young people (or their perspectives through outputs) into direct contact with those responsible for service design and delivery. This was evidenced across all five sites and a total of 49 young people (82% of primary participants) were involved in activities which brought them face to face with policy makers. This provided opportunities for them to voice their opinions and recommendations for improving service responses to DSV.

Event	Site	No. of (unique) young people involved
Presentation to local practitioners and LSCB	2	4
Trip to Houses of Parliament and Q&A with local MP	3	6
'Big conversation' event	3	8
Conference presentation – personal testimony	3	4
Research Presentations	3	2
'Youth Summit' presentations	4	5
Exhibition launch	4	9
Film launch event	5	9
AVA national conference	2	2
TOTAL		49

Fig. 5 Young people involved in presenting to professional audiences ('influencers')

- 8.13 Brief details of these events are provided below:

¹¹ Although there may be more young people who have made this shift evidence was only available in these three cases.

- Site two: Presentations developed and delivered by young people to 23 local professionals including members of the LSCB subgroup on domestic violence.
 - Site three: A published research and consultation project designed and led by young people which explored the nature of local services available to young people affected by domestic and sexual abuse; young people's understanding of healthy relationships; and their knowledge of local services. Findings from this research, which engaged 243 local young people and 22 service providers, were disseminated to local policy makers and service leads including the LSCB subgroup on Violence Against Women and Girls (see case study below).
 - Site three: Following the publication of a high profile inquiry into sexual exploitation in a nearby area, young people in site three designed and delivered a 'Big Conversation' event bringing 10 young people together to question local decision makers, including councillors, police and the local safeguarding board on their responses to sexual violence. The event fed into the local authority's own inquiry into sexual exploitation.
 - Site four: Young people attended and presented at a local authority Youth Summit as part of the programme delivery.
 - Site five: Young people developed and hosted a public event where a film they produced was shown to an invited audience of stakeholders including local authority managers and they delivered a 'Q and A' session for the professional audience.
- 8.14 In addition a national end of project event was organised in which young people's films, research and photography were shared with an audience of over 80 practitioners and policy leads¹².
- 8.15 While the impact of both these outputs and their dissemination in various contexts cannot be comprehensively measured, their presence and reach should be acknowledged. However in site three there is some noteworthy evidence of the young people's research report having direct influence on local decision making. A fuller account of this example is provided below:

Case study: peer research as a lever of influence (site three)

In site three, a central aspect of young people's influencing activities involved a research project conceived by young people with support from a volunteer evaluator. The research had two main strands: qualitative research with service providers and service users; and a questionnaire survey of young people's knowledge and understanding of healthy relationships and domestic abuse. It was designed to engage wider communities of young people within the project and develop a tool for influencing change. Young people from the AVA project took lead roles on the research collecting data (delivering street or project based surveys); analysing data and writing the report. Overall 243 young people took part and key findings included the limited services available for young people affected by domestic violence; significant barriers in accessing services and the need for more preventative work. Related recommendations were developed.

The research was subsequently published as a stand-alone report and a dissemination strategy involving young people devised including presentations to the LSCB sub group on DSV. This resulted in a subsequent commitment by the sub group to respond to each of the issues raised in the report.

Factors which support or hinder improved understanding of domestic and sexual violence

¹² Due to scheduling, at the time of writing, feedback on this event was not yet available.

- 8.16 Despite the evidence provided above it is important to acknowledge that enabling young people to influence services is a complex process. While the development of young people's influencing skills was relatively straightforward, supporting their 'ability' to bring about change was much harder to evidence. A small number of factors were identified by young people, practitioners or other project partners which they felt supported this process.
- 8.17 The first was the nature of existing relationships and networks between local project sites and those responsible for local, regional or national policy change. Although the project itself provided a conduit for national policy and influencing platforms for all five sites, local and regional links varied considerably across the five sites. Where local domestic violence coordinators were engaged from the beginning (as in site four) clear opportunities to share young people's voices and outputs were easily identified and organised.

"A local DV coordinator in site four has been good at saying 'there's these conferences coming up' or 'we're doing a joint strategic needs assessment soon, [the young people] can feed into that' and so having that local coordinator on board with it has been really useful. I know [project worker] finds it very frustrating in site three, trying to get that kind of buy-in so it depends on the context and the climate you're working in I think," (Project coordinator)

- 8.18 As illustrated above, this contrasted with site three where the lead project reported being excluded from local decision making fora relating to DSV. However it is worth noting that by the end of the project through the dissemination of the research project in site three these links had been developed and provided a means of young people and the service *"getting a place at the table"*.
- 8.19 Observations from the project coordinator suggested that this was an aspect of the project which required further strategic development in future projects.

"So I think the whole thing around them trying to influence policy and practice, I would always keep in but we need to think more about how we actually measure that and get more of a commitment from those local areas initially about how that's going to be embedded, so going to them first and saying, "We're doing this project and we really want them to engage with you and how is that best going to work for you?" (Project coordinator)

9. FINDINGS: How effective was the project's partnership working and structure?

Key Messages

- AVA's leadership of the project provided several significant opportunities for 'added value', supporting local sites with resources, networking and a route for feeding young people's messages and ideas into national policy and influencing fora.
- Practitioners from each of the sites valued the project leadership for its flexibility, supportive nature and responsiveness to changing needs of each site. Sites relied to varying degrees on support from AVA's project leadership and subsequently the ability of AVA to meet these needs varied.
- The diversity of local partners demonstrated the viability of delivering the project aims in a variety of different statutory and voluntary settings and each site presented an opportunity to work with distinct cohorts of disadvantaged and marginalised young people.
- The complexity of the project structure presented challenges for developing a shared understanding and expectations across all sites and partners. At times practitioners expressed a need for further clarification about the project resources and expectations.
- Characteristics of local sites, associated with successful delivery of the project included: a strong sense of ownership (and understanding) of the project aims; a value base that aligned to participatory practice; leverage with local influencers and decision makers.
- The project's commitment to engaging marginalised young people required acceptance of a variety of models for engaging 'cohorts' of primary and secondary participants. This included approaches to engagement which don't rely on a fixed or closed group from start to finish.

- 9.1 Alongside evidence of the impact of the programme the evaluation also sought to consider aspects of the project structure and partnerships through which it was delivered. Specifically it was asked to address:

How effectively was the project structured including a consideration of:

- *the quality of the partnerships and networks set up to deliver the project's activities*
- *engagement of wider organisations (local authority partnerships, commissioning bodies, and national services)*
- *the values underlying the project (including the approach to youth participation)?*

The following shares reflections of evidence addressing these questions and identifies a number of cross cutting themes.

Project leadership and coordination

- 9.2 AVA's suitability as project coordinator is based on a proven track record and existing expertise in:

- Addressing domestic violence (and to a lesser extent sexual violence)
- Strong partnership working across England
- Policy influencing and campaigning (e.g. contributing to changes in domestic violence legislation)

- Training development and delivery
- Preventative work with children and young people, including a commitment to the use of participatory methodologies
- Resource production (see for example www.preventionplatform.co.uk)

Added value: expertise, resources and influence

- 9.3 The evidence suggests that AVA have been well placed to lead and coordinate the project and their organisational expertise and position within the sector added value to the project in the following ways:
- utilising, or adapting existing resources (such as AVA's domestic violence awareness raising training for children and young people) to support local project delivery
 - providing national routes for dissemination of project outputs to:
 - practitioner audiences through both training and their existing "Prevention Platform" (a widely used online professional resource hub)
 - policy audiences through existing campaigning and policy work
- 9.4 In some sites these uncosted resources were essential for delivering the project outcomes and enabled ambitious project objectives to be met which were not necessarily feasible or fully costed in the existing budget.
- 9.5 Interviews with practitioners in all five sites highlighted the extensive subject expertise of the project coordinator as a resource which was highly valued and which supported their delivery and confidence.

Responding to variable needs of local partners

- 9.6 Practitioners across different sites highlighted the value of central project leadership which they characterised as "*flexible*"¹³ and "*understanding of changing project needs and direction*"¹⁴. A number of factors including those implicit in the project objectives, underpinned this. These include:
- the participatory nature of the project (designed to allow participants to inform its direction)
 - a diverse cohort of project participants, the majority of whom identified vulnerabilities or experience of adverse circumstances
 - diverse geographical and organisational contexts for delivery, and
 - precarious or changing local funding and staffing contexts
- 9.7 Centrally, the project coordinator identified that their own ability to support flexible, iterative and creative working practices was supported by a funder relationship (Big Lottery, Reaching Communities) that understood the need for this flexible approach for reasons outlined above.
- "We decided that there had to be additional domestic violence awareness sessions before the young people did any leadership work and that wasn't originally part of the bid, so that's taken an additional amount of time but it's been really valuable."* (Project coordinator)
- 9.8 For the purposes of the project, AVA's expertise, skills and influencing capacity, primarily resided in a single individual (AVA's Children and Young People's Lead) who acted as project coordinator. While this individual's skills were a highly valued asset for many of those interviewed for the evaluation, it was also noted that limits to her capacity could be a barrier to project implementation at times. The

¹³ Practitioner interview 8

¹⁴ Practitioner interview 4

reliance on a single individual (rather than wider organisational capacity) can arguably be seen as a key risk and should be considered as a potential weakness in the project structure.

- 9.9 The complexity and multi-site nature of the project resulted in diverse and at times considerable coordination and management needs from local sites. Levels of knowledge and skill among project personnel varied considerably, both within and between different sites.
- 9.10 This diversity resulted in variable needs for the project coordinator's support and different expectations around this. There was clear evidence that the project coordinator demonstrated willingness to respond flexibly to the varying and emerging needs with unplanned interventions (for example directly facilitating additional sessions for young people). However practitioners in two sites, (potentially those who had less experience of work in this area) expressed a desire for greater support ("*a bit of hand holding*"¹⁵) and direction from AVA. For other practitioners this did not appear to be an issue.

Communication and partners understanding of the wider project

- 9.11 The complexity of the project structure was also raised as an issue for some practitioners who wanted greater clarity from the outset about the role and relationships between partners and strands of work:

"I feel a big learning for them would be that had everybody who's involved in it, got together round a table at the very beginning, back in April or early May, I think I might have got a much clearer picture how everybody fitted together." (Practitioner, site one)

- 9.12 As previously noted given the complexity of the project and, necessarily undefined outputs, managing partners' expectations carefully is clearly challenging but vital. There may be justification for ensuring additional resources during early project set up of comparable projects and further opportunities to bring representatives from different sites together to surface differing expectations.

Local partnerships structure and delivery

- 9.13 Thematic analysis of interview, focus group, observational and report data demonstrated the viability of delivering the project aims in a variety of distinct statutory and voluntary settings and illustrated how each site presented an opportunity to work with distinct cohorts of disadvantaged and marginalised young people. Following this analysis the following aspects of project structure and context were identified as significant on project delivery across the five sites.

Strong commitment and ownership of Project locally

- 9.14 The most significant contextual factor appeared to be the presence (or absence) of practitioners locally who had a strong understanding, ownership and subsequently commitment to the project. This was most striking in site one where circumstances were significantly '*stacked against the delivery of the project*' and yet the project was felt to meet and surpass its aims. This was overwhelmingly attributed to frontline project workers and a local service manager going '*above and beyond*' and '*pulling out all the stops*' due to a genuine belief in the significance of the project to participants.
- 9.15 Unsurprisingly, it appears that individuals who were involved in the initial development of the bid demonstrated the clearest understanding of, commitment to and ownership of the project.
- 9.16 In sites where frontline practitioners delivering the project a) reported feeling distant from the project coordinator, with limited direct contact and/or b) did not have local management who was strongly committed to the project a comparable sense of ownership or commitment was not identified.

¹⁵ Practitioner interview 5

- 9.17 For some of those who weren't involved in the initial bid writing the complexity of the project structure and/or a lack of effective communication about the project, appear to have presented challenges to them gaining a clear understanding of the project's aims and expectations. This may have limited the potential of developing a clear shared vision across diverse projects and sites (see section 9.11).

Funding structure and security

- 9.18 In each of the sites limitations of funding and resources presented challenges for project delivery. This was particularly significant when local partners' core funding was threatened and staff's time was reduced or attention re-directed towards fundraising activities. This may be an inevitable consequence of any project whose funding structure is activity based and does not include core organisational funding for partners. An associated issue was staff turnover. In particular, for a lead member of staff in site one the impending project closure meant they needed to identify alternative employment prior to completion of the project.
- 9.19 Each of the project partners (and the project coordinator) identified that the initial resources for delivery of the project did not fully meet some of the unexpected needs which emerged during the course of the project.

"What we didn't account into with the funding is staff hours, as in we've got the face to face work, but me and [project worker] have done loads of additional work. Like liaising with social services, doing referrals, dealing with disclosures, all that kind of stuff...We've coped with it, but obviously for you to do the project again I think you need to factor that in with the funding, ... it has been something that I don't think anybody thought about." (Practitioner, site four)

- 9.20 It should be noted however that in the example provided above, the additional disclosures made as a result of participation in the project were also identified as an element of 'added value' – supporting practitioners to recognise unmet needs which may otherwise have gone unrecognised and subsequently supporting young people to access critical safeguarding support.
- 9.21 One consequence of limited resources was the need for partners to work creatively and identify additional opportunities for partnerships. In a number of sites this led to fruitful partnership working some of which has been sustained and developed beyond the life of the project.
- 9.22 Following the discontinuation of work in site six, after a period of development, additional funds were distributed to sites three, four and five (sites one and two had completed the project by this point¹⁶). In each site these additional unanticipated funds enabled practitioners to support young people to develop their own ideas for initiatives and activities that emerged as a result of the project. Although unplanned, this opportunity further supported the participatory aims of the project by facilitating youth led work.
- 9.23 Interestingly in the site in which funding was least secure (resulting in the service closure prior to the project end), these difficulties were overcome and respondents attributed the project's success to a staff commitment to meeting the project aims - recognising its relevance and significance for participants.

Existing relationships with potential participants

- 9.24 The diversity of local project structures and existing patterns of engagement with young people had significant impacts on which (and how many) young people were engaged with the project. Pressure to 'recruit' participants was felt variably across the sites and presented most challenges for those services who did not already have a 'captive audience' (i.e. a sustained group of young people already

¹⁶ Refer to Fig 1: Overview of sites, for a more detailed outline of timing of projects.

accessing their services). For these services considerable resources had to be directed to recruiting participants before the project could start.

- 9.25 Where projects were able to build on strong existing relationships with participants, or had 'centre based' activities, sustained engagement of a consistent cohort across the project timeline appeared more feasible (Sites one, two and five). However alternative models were successfully developed in other sites described as 'rolling recruitment' – recognising that the nature of the cohort would change over time and the need to draw new participants into the project throughout and expect that others would end their involvement prior to completion of the project.
- 9.26 Another alternative model of engagement undertaken in site three worked intensively with a core (though fluid) group of participants and engaged wider numbers of participants less intensively through various one-off consultation opportunities. Both models clearly had value and there is no means of assessing if either is more appropriate or valuable. What is clear is that the projects' commitment to engaging marginalised young people required acceptance of a variety of models for engaging 'cohorts' of primary, secondary and tertiary participants.

Values, knowledge, skill base and support of frontline practitioners

- 9.27 The design of the project was underpinned by a number of clear ideological principles. These include youth work principles (including voluntary engagement of participants); participatory practices; and feminist approaches to violence against women and girls. Based on interview data it appears that the degree to which these principles were shared and understood by local partners varied significantly – both in terms of organisational ethos and individual staff experience.
- 9.28 Where local partners were less familiar with working within these ideological frameworks they voiced a greater level of confusion about the project design and purpose and a desire for greater 'hand holding'. This was particularly evident in relation to the 'participatory' aspects of the work and the concept of sites developing their own programmes of DSV awareness raising work.
- 9.29 While the project design specifically allowed for a level of unpredictability and an approach to project planning that was informed by emergent ideas of participants, a number of partners reported experiencing this as a lack of structure or clarity and voiced a need for more detailed direction.
- 9.30 A similar issue related to the level of local partners' knowledge of DSV. The requirement of the project to develop participants' knowledge and awareness (to influence either peers or wider service providers) relied on those delivering the project to have both the knowledge and related training approaches to foster this among participants. Again frontline practitioners reported variable levels of confidence and comfort with this aspect of the project. While AVA provided DV awareness raising resources to local project partners there did not appear to be a consistent approach to this (or consistent portfolio of resources). While AVA explained a desire to create ownership at local level of the project there were varying levels of satisfaction among project partners about this.

Leverage with local strategic and policy makers

- 9.31 As outlined above, each local partner had different relationships with local strategic partners designing and implementing responses to DSV. Local project partners' ability to meet project aims associated with young people influencing service design and delivery depended in part on these relationships. Opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful dialogue with local (or national) policy makers were in part influenced by these organisational relationships.
- 9.32 However it is also recognised that the project coordinator has significant political leverage in terms of influencing and campaigning on DSV and this was used as a means of feeding young people's perspectives directly into national policy fora.

A flexible responsive project design (and associated funding)

- 9.33 A number of practitioners noted the value of flexibility and trust from the project coordinator in enabling the project to evolve and adapt to the needs of different (and sometimes changing) local cohorts. This was identified as a useful mechanism for enabling project delivery in diverse, changing and sometimes challenging contexts.
- 9.34 This was also noted to support young people's own innovation and facilitate opportunities for them to take control. Crucially young people and staff from local sites were allowed to retain editorial control and ownership of the resources they produced or training they delivered. This resulted in a diverse range of resources being produced which reflected the authentic 'voice' of five distinct groups of young people.
- 9.35 However, as noted above (see section 9.28) this openness created anxiety for some practitioners who sought further clarity and focus within a broad, flexible project.
- 9.36 An associated point was the duration of the project (three years) which presented both opportunities and challenges. On the plus side this appeared to allow the project to evolve and respond to young people's ideas. However it was also described by one practitioner as creating potential for 'drift'. Sustaining engagement of participants over this period of time was undoubtedly challenging, particularly given that young people faced considerable competing priorities and transitions during this time (for example moving into education, employment or parenthood). Acknowledging these as unavoidable aspects of the project allowed projects to develop successful strategies for responding to this (such as the rolling recruitment model mentioned in section 9.25 above).

National/ local media and political interest

- 9.37 The project coincided with a significant increase in national media and political interest in addressing both DSV among children and young people. In this sense the project was timely and a number of additional opportunities for influencing or partnerships seemed to be associated with this wider interest and may have contributed to a climate of greater openness for initiatives addressing these issues.
- 9.38 Interestingly despite this interest, young people who took part in the project reported limited opportunities to engage in dialogue with their peers about these issues prior to involvement in the project. The lack of alternative provision for young people to access DSV knowledge, coupled with the direct relevance of the issues for many participants were identified as important motivating factors for engagement and the project clearly responded to an important need among these groups of young people.
- 9.39 A related point was that in at least one area, intense media scrutiny and political interest relating to historical sexual exploitation was felt to contribute to a culture of risk aversion which impeded the organisation of young people's local influencing and engagement work (site three).

10. CONCLUSION

Concluding observations and learning for future initiatives

- 10.1 All elements of the evaluation provided evidence of clear benefits of involvement in the project for participants. Areas where evidence was characterised as particularly strong related to increasing participants' understanding of domestic violence (and to a lesser extent sexual violence) and increasing participants' self-confidence. Significant evidence was also identified of the participants' developing knowledge and skills relating to influencing others; accessing wider life opportunities and increasing their sense of self-efficacy as a result of their participation in the project.
- 10.2 Examples from the project demonstrated the potential for young people to exert significant influence on either their peers or local service design through work that was developed and led by them. The idea of 'learning by doing' or 'learning by teaching others' provided a model through which learning was embedded and young people's commitment to addressing the issue deepened.
- 10.3 Similarly there was strong evidence to demonstrate that the project had successfully met its aim of engaging young people who were particularly marginalised or disadvantaged. The nature of young people who engaged with the project was determined by the local site partners who collectively demonstrated strengths in engaging young parents, young people excluded from mainstream education, those with care experience; those experiencing mental health difficulties and young people with experience of various forms of violence and abuse. The project was less successful at engaging young men.
- 10.4 Patterns of young people's engagement in the project varied both between sites and within sites across the duration of the project. It was clear that the project's success required a flexible approach to young people's engagement which recognised, and adapted to, the diversity of needs among the project cohort. This was particularly important in sites where the project lasted for up to three years.
- 10.5 Project partners voiced strong support for the project and described witnessing extensive positive impacts on young people. They noted that the project enabled them to do work which they had previously identified as important and responded to identified needs but which hadn't previously been resourced.
- 10.6 There were challenges too. Some of these were associated with the external aspects of site contexts (funding, staffing and relationships with local services). Other challenges were identified with the limited resources available for an ambitious and multi-faceted project (both centrally and in local sites); the complexity of supporting young people to exert influence at service level; and challenges with communicating clear aims and expectations about the project to diverse project partners. The potential of national links between different sites and projects was not fully realised and, with the exception of the final event, opportunities to share learning across the sites (and cohorts of young people) were not possible within the scope of the project. This represents a clear opportunity for future work.
- 10.7 Factors identified as critical to the success of the project – or any other similar initiative – include
 - identification of appropriate local partners (with knowledge and skills to deliver domestic violence work; and who can engage and support young people facing adverse circumstances);
 - local partners with strong ownership and commitment to the project at management level;
 - local frontline project staff with a clear understanding of aims and expectations;
 - project leadership which demonstrates flexibility and creativity in responding to the evolving needs of the project; and
 - a youth work (informal education) model using group-work and voluntary engagement.

10.8 Other important factors which supported the achievement of project's aims (at both central and local levels) included:

- a commitment to participatory practice
- additional 'added value' opportunities identified
- participants' experience direct and tangible evidence of their influence within the lifespan of the project
- strong strategic networks through which to disseminate young people's work and enable them to exert influence; and
- a framework for accrediting young people's work.

10.9 Finally it is important to note that the project met a significant and widely shared interest among young people to learn more about DSV and to support their peers to stay safe and/or access support.

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